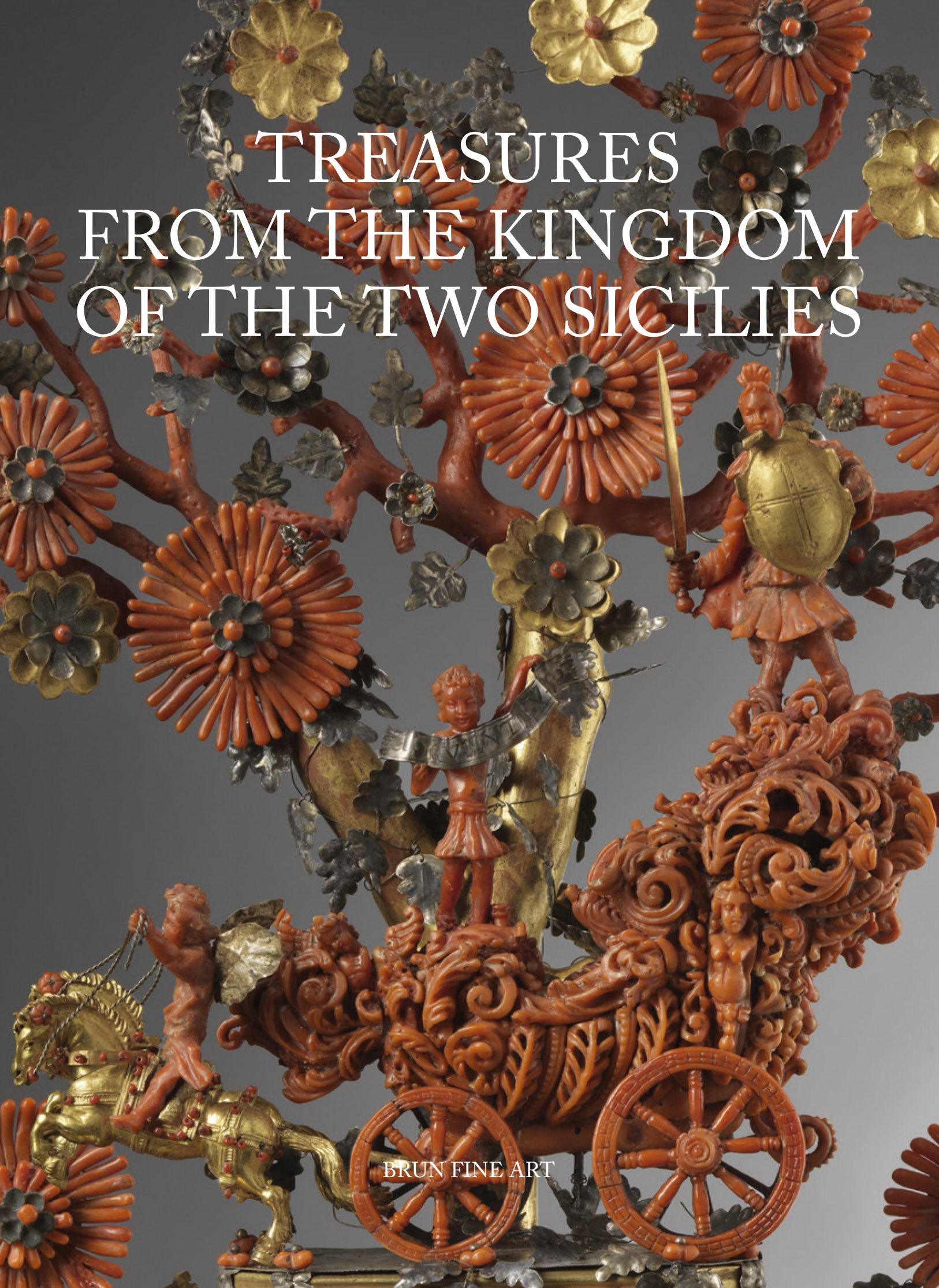




TREASURES FROM THE KINGDOM OF THE TWO SICILIES

BRUN FINE ART

TREASURES FROM THE KINGDOM OF THE TWO SICILIES

Paintings - Sculptures - Decorative Arts
(15th to 19th centuries)

Edited by Andrea Bacchi

Entries by
Andrea Bacchi, Gianluca Bocchi, Angela Caròla-Perrotti, Enrico Colle, Orazio Lovino,
Giuseppe Porzio, Roberto Valeriani,

2025

BRUN FINE ART - LONDON

Brun Fine Art

London

+44 (0) 20 7493 0195 info@brunfineart.com

Milan

Via Carlo Pisacane 40, 20129 Milano

Via Gesù 17, 20121 Milano

+39 02 29518031 info@brunfineart.it

Florence

Palazzo Larderel, Via dei Tornabuoni 19, 50123 Firenze

+39 02 29518031 info@brunfineart.it

www.brunfineart.com

Translations: Erika Milburn

Photographs: Arrigo Coppitz, Elena Datrino, Claudio Giusti, Paolo Soave, Inu Studio, Gianni Zotta

Augusto and Marco Brun and the authors of the catalogue wish to thank: Alessandra Bernabovi, Anna Cramarossa, Francesca Ghiringhelli, Giovanni Lacerenza, Cristina Morini, Pilar Pandini, Maurizio Vitella

Layout: Lisa Esposito - Grafica Interlinea, Trento

© 2025 BRUN FINE ART

All rights reserved

ISBN: 978-1-7384779-5-1

Contents

Introduction	pag.	9
1. Sicilian painter of the last quarter of the 15 th century <i>The apostle Peter in bishop's robes</i>	pag.	10
2. Francesco Fracanzano <i>Moses striking water from the rock</i>	pag.	24
3. Francesco Fracanzano <i>The penitent St Peter</i>	pag.	34
4. Filippo Vitale <i>Joseph and Potiphar's wife</i>	pag.	40
5. Johann Heinrich Schönfeld <i>Idealised portrait of a soldier</i>	pag.	46
6. Workshop of Vicktor Bieler, second quarter of the 17 th century <i>Cabinet</i>	pag.	50
7. Trapani, mid-17 th century <i>Pair of octagonal frames</i>	pag.	58
8. Trapani, mid-17 th century <i>Shrine</i>	pag.	62
9. Trapani, second half of the 17 th century <i>Crucifix</i>	pag.	66
10. Palermo, late 17 th century <i>Triumph with St Michael the archangel</i>	pag.	70
11. Trapani, second half of the 17 th century <i>Cabinet</i>	pag.	78
12. Giovanni Rasanelli called il Fiorentino (attr.), late 17 th century <i>Embroidered flounce</i>	pag.	84
13. Paolo Porpora <i>Pomegranates, grapes, figs and mushrooms in a basket, in a box and on the ground, branch of tuberose in a glass vase</i>	pag.	90

14.	Trapani, end of the 17 th century <i>Pair of candlesticks</i>	pag. 98
15.	Trapani, late 17 th -early 18 th century <i>Crucifix</i>	pag. 104
16.	Trapani, 17 th /18 th century <i>Inkwell</i>	pag. 110
17.	Trapani, late 17 th -early 18 th century <i>Frame</i>	pag. 114
18.	Sicily, second quarter of the 18 th century <i>Pair of chandeliers</i>	pag. 118
19.	Trapani, first half of the 18 th century <i>Devotional plaque</i>	pag. 122
20.	Giovanni Clavella, second quarter of the 18 th century <i>Pair of bureau-cabinets</i>	pag. 128
21.	Sicily, third quarter of the 18 th century <i>Pair of commodes</i>	pag. 136
22.	Giuseppe and Gennaro Sarao (attr.) <i>Inkwell</i>	pag. 142
23.	Trapani, mid-18 th century <i>Crucifix</i>	pag. 150
24.	Andrea Tipa and workshop, mid-18 th century <i>Adoration of the shepherds</i>	pag. 154
25.	Lorenzo De Caro <i>Abduction of Proserpina</i>	pag. 162
26.	Baldassare De Blasio <i>San Joseph with the child</i> <i>San Vincent Ferrer</i>	pag. 166
27.	Giuseppe Sanmartino <i>Angel</i>	pag. 172
28.	Viva Brothers <i>The patience of Job or Job derided</i>	pag. 182
29.	Gaetano Dattilo <i>Presentation of Jesus at the temple</i> <i>Presentation of Mary at the temple</i>	pag. 188

30. Palermo, late 18th century
Tabletop with a sampler of sicilian hardstones pag. 196
31. Palermo, late 18th century
Pair of guéridons pag. 202
32. Neapolitan manufactory of Cherinto del Vecchio (1782-1860)
Amphora-shaped creamware vase with 'columnar' handles, decorated with folk scenes, 1818-1820 pag. 206

From the 15th century and almost until the present, the tradition of Italian art criticism has always significantly devalued all those arts that in contrast to painting and sculpture seemed exclusively linked to a manual skill: the minor arts. This is particularly evident in academia: what prominent Italian university professor has built up his or her own scholarly identity by working on porcelain, micromosaics or hardstones? Consequently, these hyper-specialized and sophisticated disciplines have always remained a focus for the interest and intelligence of brilliant outsiders; in Italy, some of the first names that come to my mind are those of Alvar Gonzáles-Palacios and Roberto Valeriani, the latter in some ways a student of the former, neither of whom has ever held a university post. At my own wishes and those of Augusto and Marco Brun this catalogue is duly dedicated to Roberto: the entries he wrote for it will be his last publications. He would have authored many more, but for his sudden and untimely death last November.

Roberto studied to become an architect and from 1985 published numerous studies that continue to be reference texts in their specific fields. As well as those on European porcelain, we should mention at least his important studies of Neoclassical goldsmiths – especially Luigi Valadier – and in general on the taste of this time, which he comprehensively investigated, but also his studies on truly sophisticated topics such as gemstone carving. In all his scholarly work, Roberto always combined archival research and historical expertise with a direct rapport with the artefacts, an aspect that is always crucial for art historians but even more so in the field of the decorative arts. Encountering an object that may have no prior history or name, and successfully positioning it in its cultural context, recognizing its quality and value, is always challenging. Roberto often proved his worth in this capacity, specifically for Augusto and Marco Brun, editing a series of excellent catalogues that I wish to recall here, from *Decorative Arts* in 2015 to *Pietre dure* in 2019, and providing an exemplary contribution to the more recent *Venetian* and *Roman Treasures* (2022 and 2023). In the present volume, the scholar returned to another field often neglected by general histories of the decorative arts, the magnificent and precious art of coral carving, a topic that he had already dealt with in 2016, again for the Brun, in a truly special monographic catalogue, *A Collection of Corals*.

Roberto will be sorely missed.

Andrea Bacchi

1.

Sicilian painter of the last quarter of the 15th century

THE APOSTLE PETER IN BISHOP'S ROBES

Eighth-ninth decade of the 15th century

Tempera and gold ground on panel, 137 x 69 cm; 162 x 95.5 x 12.2 cm with frame

The painting is on a wooden support (likely poplar) with vertical veins, reinforced on the back by three modern crossbars and wooden dowels that with the metal frame around the edges make it impossible to determine the number of boards used (one or perhaps two) and the original system of crosswise supports. Against a gold ground, applied using the water gilding technique and tooled, and on a neutral-coloured platform stands St Peter dressed in bishop's robes. The orientation of the bishop and the hint of an arch at the top of the gold ground suggest that this is a left-hand side panel from the main register of a polyptych, originally encased in a wooden support – it is difficult to say if this had an ogee, depressed or round arch since the top edge of the panel has evidently been reduced.

The austere and wrinkled head is the only part of the body to emerge from the opulent ecclesiastical robes adorning the figure of the apostle: a blue-green velvet alb decorated with a gilt square at the bottom and a neckline garnished in gold, pearls and cabochons, and, finally, a brocade cope with a griccia motif, lined in grey and edged with a galloon with pseudo-kufic lettering. Also in evidence are the red bishop's sandals, the stole placed over the left wrist and the jewelled liturgical gloves covering the hands, intent on browsing through a dark blue book and holding St Peter's keys, hung from a fine cord from the left hand.

Hitherto unpublished, the panel appears for the solid positioning of the saint on the dais, the light bathing the figure from the right, the sculptural cadences of the garments with their tubular folds and the studied rendering of the ornaments to belong to a specific cultural context. This is that combination of Iberian-Flemish, Provencal-Burgundian and central Italian styles developed in the Naples, after Colantonio, by Antonello da Messina and by the Master of Saints Severinus and Sossius. The solemn composition and the immobile tone of the St Peter more directly presuppose a knowledge of Antonello developed in Sicily through works such as the older St Zosimus in the Siracusa cathedral or paintings of the early 1470s, like the triptych belonging to the Regione Lombardia and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence (Fig. 1), now recomposed in the latter museum, and the polyptych of St Gregory, dated to 1473, in

* I wish to thank Andrea De Marchi, Giulia Majolino and Marta Vizzini for their support while undertaking this study.





1. Antonello da Messina, *polyptych with the Virgin and Child, St. John the Evangelist and St. Benedict*, c. 1473, Milano, Regione Lombardia/Florence, Uffizi Galleries

the Museo regionale di Messina (Fig. 2)¹. The rendering of space is entrusted exclusively to the cone of shadow thrown by the protagonist onto the greyish floor and recalls the St Zosimus and the saints in the Uffizi, still lacking the detailed description of perspective later developed by Antonello in the architectural settings of the polyptych of St Gregory. Furthermore, our painting seems to derive from this latter work and the others by Antonello mentioned above the geometrical rendering of the heavy fabrics. There are striking parallels between the subdivision of St Peter's draperies and those of the cloak of St John the Evangelist in the Uffizi or of the chasuble of St Gregory the Great in Messina. Other details, too, may have their distant origins in the assimilation of prototypes by Antonello; these include the stole resting on the wrist, which already appears in the Messina St Gregory, or the pearly embroidered lining as in the chasuble of St Benedict in the Uffizi.

However, our anonymous painter works in a different way from Antonello in the attempt to mimetically render the lustres of the liturgical vestments: while the latter seeks to attain optical ver-

¹ Fiorella Sricchia Santoro, *Antonello da Messina: i suoi mondi, il suo seguito*, Florence 2017, pp. 91-97, 153-174 (with preceding bibliography).





2. Antonello da Messina,
St. Gregory polyptych,
detail with *St. Gregory
the Great*, 1473, Messina,
Museo Regionale

isimilitude through an effortlessly graceful opalescence, using gold only sparingly, our artist makes an ample use of gold leaf applied using mission glue. In the warp and weft of the brocade it follows the movements of the fabric, in contrast to the overall plant design, which is transposed onto a flat plane but given a three-dimensional appearance by the intense black brush strokes that emphasize the hollows of the folds. The artist responsible for the St Peter also pursues Antonello's treatment of psychology and outward appearance through a different painting style that graphically renders the apostle's individuality through his face, crossed by wrinkles and veiled with unease.

Its contextualization within the style of Antonello might initially suggest that this interesting painting should be ascribed to eastern Sicily, in the circles of the family workshop² and in parallel with other masters drawn to the teachings of Antonello – from the weaker artists responsible for the altarpieces of St Nicholas and St Martin at Randazzo and the Virgin and Child formerly on the Roman market, to the more able Master of the Piazza Armerina Cross³. However, it is in the western part of the island that we may find a figurative parallel for our panel.

² Sricchia Santoro, *Antonello* cit., pp. 251-347; Charlene Vella, *In the Footsteps of Antonello da Messina: the Antonelliani between Sicily and Venice*, Valletta 2022.

³ Illustrated in Sricchia Santoro, *Antonello* cit., pp. 123 Fig. 26, 135 Fig. 36, 166 Fig. 17, 171 Fig. 22.

In the Museo di Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo is a painted Cross (Fig. 3), originally from the monastery of the Annunziata in Corleone and assimilated by critics to the style of the painter Riccardo Quartararo (Sciacca, 1443 – Palermo, 1506/1507)⁴, but very often judged not to be by his own hand and consequently attributed to a follower, to his circle or to an assistant⁵. If we compare the head of St Peter to the mourners and the Christ of the Cross (Figs 4-5) we see a singular proximity in the lengthening of the skull and in the treatment, as if made of embossed metal, of the facial anatomy – the nose, eyelids, the bags under the eyes, the wrinkles – constructed on a base of verdaccio in a thready and dashed painting style, contrasting with red patches and areas of light. The slightly hairy eyebrows and the black outline of the brown iris heighten the facial similarities. Despite the material difference between the luxurious vestments of the pope-saint and the more modest garments of the figures in the Corleone Cross, a potential analogy can also be seen in the treatment of the garments. For example, in both the apostle's cape and Christ's loincloth (Fig. 6), sharp folds are juxtaposed with the sinuous fall of the draperies raised into the air, while the wrinkles drawn with a brush are shared by Peter's shirt and the Virgin's wimple (Fig. 7).

There are also significant analogies in the working of the gold. St Peter's nimbus (ø 20.5 cm) surrounded by a dozen compass turns, is incised with very fine strigilated rays that can also be seen in the halo of the Christ in the Corleone Cross (Fig. 8). This formula may originate with Fra Angelico (in some nimbuses in the *Croce al Tempio* Lamentation in the Museo di San Marco in Florence or in the Palazzo Corsini triptych in Rome), spreading to Naples, probably via Rome, through the Master of Saints Severinus and Sossius, before passing to other southern Italian painters. Among them is Quartararo, who used it in the *Dormition of the Virgin* at Capodimonte (Fig. 9) executed for the Ferrillo chapel in Santa Maria la Nova in Naples between 1491 and 1492⁶, before his definitive return to Palermo where he is attested in 1494⁷.

⁴ Cfr. Antonella Dentamaro, entry on *Quartararo, Riccardo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, LXXXV (2016), p. 815 (with preceding bibliography, accessible on the DBI website).

⁵ For a history of criticism see the overview in Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Le croci dipinte in Sicilia. L'area occidentale dal XIV al XVI secolo*, Palermo 1992, pp. 93-94, 141 no. 17; Teresa Pugliatti, *Pittura del Cinquecento in Sicilia. La Sicilia occidentale*, Naples 1998, p. 45; and, with preceding bibliography, the important recent study by Giulia Majolino, *Per un corpus delle croci dipinte in Sicilia dal XIII al XV secolo: aspetti stilistici, iconografici e funzionali*, Ph.D. thesis, Università degli Studi di Firenze, XXXVI ciclo, 2024, pp. 26, 160-162, 395-396 no. IV.48, which cautiously assigns the Cross (329 x 265 cm) to Quartararo with an assistant and dates it to the ninth decade of the 15th century. She also asks, given the unusual presence on the right-hand terminal of St Peter with John the Evangelist, if this might not point to a provenance from the church of San Pietro in Corleone, for which the carpenter Giovanni Scaturro was commissioned to make a cross already in 1469.

⁶ Fausta Navarro, in *Il polittico di San Severino Apostolo del Norico. Restauri e recuperi*, catalogue of the exhibition (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, 18 December 1989-4 March 1990), ed. by Ferdinando Bologna, Naples 1989, pp. 105-106, no. 1; Donato Salvatore, *Tra Fiandre e Napoli sul finire del Quattrocento*, in "Dialoghi di storia dell'arte", VI, 1998, pp. 16-17 note 27.

⁷ This motif, which has been noted in Angelico (Andrea De Marchi, *Oro come luce, luce come oro. L'operazione*



3. *Painted Cross*, Palermo, Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Abatellis (from Corleone, Annunziata)



4-5. *Painted Cross*, details, Palermo, Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Abatellis (from Corleone, Annunziata)

Remaining on the technical level, the gold ground behind the saint is resplendent with granulated plant motifs in relief, following a tradition also adopted in Sicily by Antonello, as in the Uffizi triptych (Fig. 10)⁸. In contrast to the slender late-Gothic arabesques with oak leaves

delle lamine metalliche da Simone Martini a Pisanello, fra mimesi e anagogia, in *Medioevo, natura e figura*, ed. by Arturo Quintavalle, Milan 2015, p. 702) and in the Corleone Cross (Majolino, *Per un corpus*, cit., p. 26 and note 31), has been found also in the Master of Andria and duly noted for the Cross by Majolino (*Per un corpus*, cit., p. 26 and note 31), in the Master of Andria (altarpiece of the same name in the Museo Diocesano) and in Pietro Buono/Befulco (altarpieces with St Anne in a private collection, in Santa Maria Segreta in Milan and with the Annunciation at Capodimonte), cfr. Orazio Lovino, in *Rinascimento visto da Sud. Matera, l'Italia meridionale e il Mediterraneo tra '400 e '500*, catalogue of the exhibition (Matera, Palazzo Lanfranchi, 19 April-19 August 2019), ed. by Dora Catalano et. al., Naples 2019, pp. 366-367, no. 5.18; Id., *Rinascimento in Terra di Bari. Nuove riflessioni sul Maestro d'Andria e su Tuccio d'Andria al bivio tra Napoli e la Liguria*, in "Bollettino d'arte", 47-48, 2020 (2021), p. 49; Id., *Per una storia della pala d'altare dipinta nel Regno di Napoli 1443-1530*, Ph.D. thesis, Università degli Studi di Firenze/Universiteit van Amsterdam, XXXV ciclo, 2023, I, p. 253, II, pp. 8, 48, 167.

⁸ The ornamental technique known as *opus punctorium* with a plant pattern (on which cfr. at least Andrea De Marchi, *Interferenze possibili tra oreficeria e pittura nel Nord Italia, prima e dopo Gentile da Fabriano*, in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di lettere e Filosofia. Quaderni", XV, 2004, pp. 27-47; Id., *Oro come luce*, cit.; Emanuele Zappasodi, *Descrivere la tradizione, codificare l'avanguardia: Cennino e la lavorazione dell'oro in tavola tra Trecento e Quattrocento*, in "Predella", LI, 2022, pp. 40-41; Virginia Caramico, *Le tecniche della pittura medievale. Materiali, lavorazioni e percezione visiva*, Turin 2024, pp. 142-160), plausibly introduced to Sicilian painting from Spain (Emanuele Zappasodi, *Ristudiando Gherardo Starnina. Materiali e comparazioni per i polittici con i pilieri*, in "Nuovi studi", XXII, 2017, 23, pp. 80-81 note 44; Mariaceleste Di Meo, *Siracusa internazionale: aggiunte al catalogo del Maestro di San Martino e del Maestro di Santa Maria*, in "Arte Cristiana", CMXVI, 2018, p. 66 note 9), spread widely through the island throughout the 15th century and saw a considerable development in mainland southern Italy (in addition to the Sicilian Pavanino Panormita – who replicates the minute racemes of the Master of the Palermo Coronations –, see Giovanni da Gaeta, Battista da Capua, Pietro Buono/Befulco, Cristoforo Scacco, Pseudo Tuccio di Gioffredo da Fondi, Vincenzo de Rogata, the Master of the Franciscan Polyptychs, Bartolomeo Guelfo, Andrea da Salerno, Simone da Firenze, on whom cfr. Orazio Lovino, *In margine all'Andrea Sabatini di padre Resta e altre aggiunte*, in "Paragone", III s., LXXII, 2021 (2022), 159-160, p. 21, Plts 19a-b; Id., *Per una storia della pala* cit., passim).





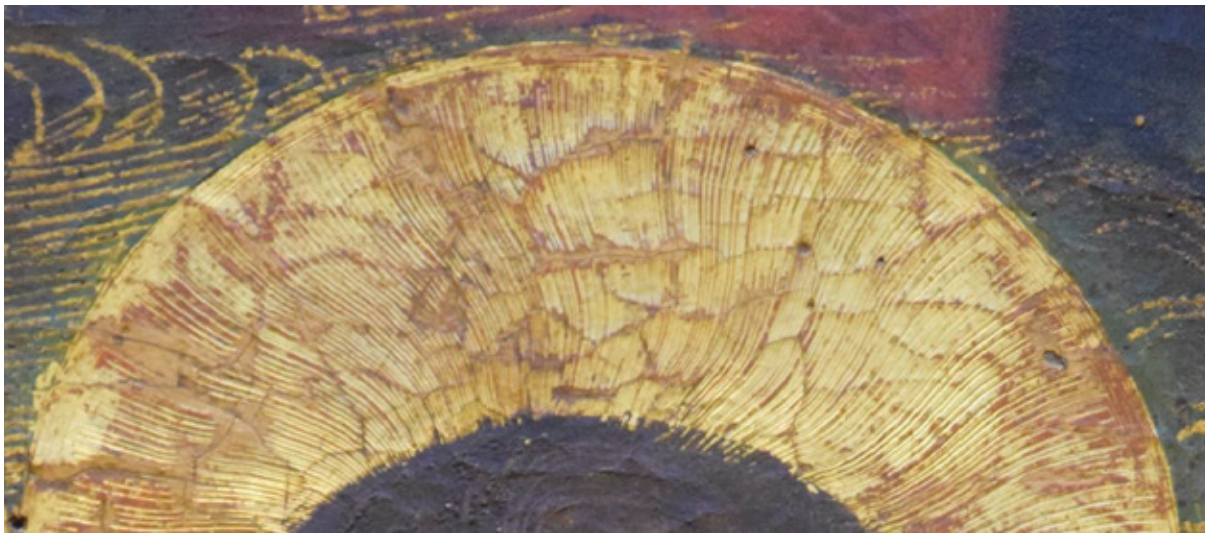
6-7. *Painted Cross*, details, Palermo, Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Abatellis (from Corleone, Annunziata)

or little flowers used by Antonello⁹, St Peter is surrounded by unusual classicizing racemes that end in tendrils with five-petalled flowers or develop into fleshy acanthus spirals (up to around 16.5 cm wide), from which burst busts of aulos players in the strip level with the saint's shoulders. The choice to arrange the racemes in disciplined parallel and specular rows seems correlated with the organization of grounds with plant motifs, presenting several more contained spirals, found in some gilded 15th century Neapolitan altarpieces, starting with the Annunciation triptych in Fondi by Cristoforo Scacco (Fig. 11). The motif is later taken up in the polyptychs of

⁹ Other examples by Antonello include the lost St Nicholas of Bari formerly in Messina, the Fathers of the Church in the Museo di Messina, and the copy of the Virgin on the art market, cfr. Sricchia Santoro, *Antonello* cit., pp. 114, Fig. 15, 135, Fig. 36, 160-163 Figs 12-14.



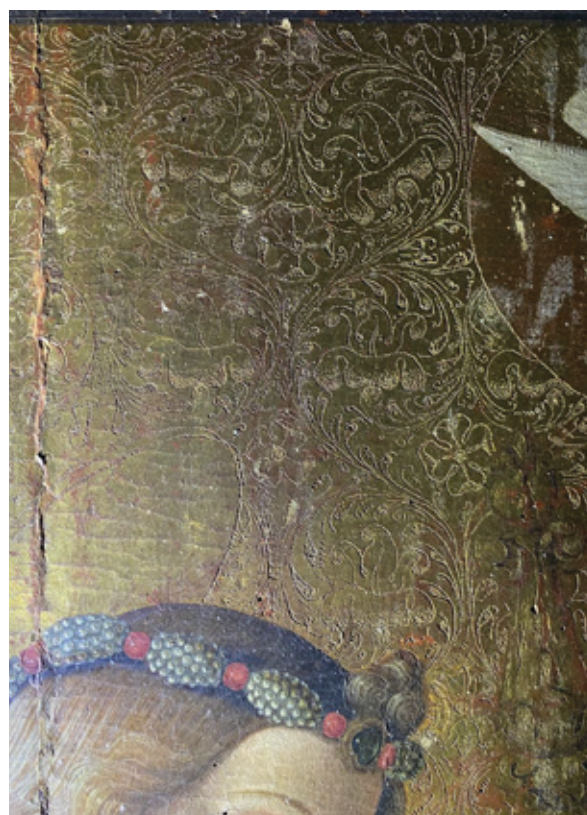
8. *Painted Cross*, details, Palermo, Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Abatellis (from Corleone, Annunziata)



9. Riccardo Quartararo, *Dormitio Virginis Ferrillo*, detail, 1491-92, Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte (from Santa Maria la Nova)



10. Antonello da Messina, *polyptych*, detail, Florence, Uffizi Galleries



11. Cristoforo Scacco, *Annunciation*, detail, Fondi, San Pietro (from SS. Annunziata)

Quartararo (Gaeta, Museo Diocesano), of Pseudo Tuccio di Gioffredo da Fondi (Piedimonte Matese, Santa Maria Maggiore) and of Vincenzo de Rogata (Salerno, Museo Diocesano)¹⁰.

The difficulties encountered by scholars in assigning to Quartararo the Palermo Cross and the formal connections between it and the St Peter suggest the prudent hypothesis that the two works should be attributed to the same artist at different times in his career: one grounded in the works of Antonello da Messina of the seventh and eighth decade of the 15th century, the other up to date on those of Quartararo of the 1490s, like the Ferrillo Dormition of the Virgin or the Coronation of the Virgin in Palazzo Abatellis¹¹. The chronological sequence of the reference works by the two masters from Messina and Sciacca thus make it preferable to place the Cross (c. 1490s) after the St Peter (c. 1470s-80s), as it would seem more difficult to explain an early phase inspired by Quartararo followed by a shift towards a Neo-Antonellian style. These considerations, though still premature, could be put to the test were other works by the same artist to emerge, perhaps starting from the other panels that probably made up a dismembered polyptych of unknown provenance, with St Peter in the most prominent position. Finally, an external clue potentially supporting an original destination for a church in Palermo or its vicinity is the fact that the panel formerly belonged to a collection in this city, responsible for inserting the painting into its current Neoclassical frame¹².

ORAZIO LOVINO

¹⁰ Lovino, *Per una storia della pala* cit., II, pp. 41-42, n. A.III.9, 44-47, no. A.III.11-12, 51-52, no. A.III.15.

¹¹ Cfr. supra note 5 and Pugliatti, *Pittura in Sicilia* cit., pp. 31-35, 58 Plt. I.

¹² It is currently impossible to advance hypotheses on the provenance of our painting, in part due to its popular subject. In passing we could mention two churches dedicated to St Peter: the church of San Pietro la Bagnara in Palermo, for which Quartararo executed the panel with Sts Peter and Paul (1494) now in Palazzo Abatellis (initially commissioned from and partially executed, on the back, by Pietro Ruzzolone, cfr. Pugliatti, *Pittura in Sicilia* cit., p. 26, Plt. I, Figs 7-8, 54), and the parish church of San Pietro in Corleone.



MOSES STRIKING WATER FROM THE ROCK

Ca. 1635–1637

Oil on canvas, 97 × 130 cm

This remarkable painting, which as far as I know has not yet received scholarly attention and has hitherto been accompanied by an erroneous attribution to Cesare Fracanzano, is in fact the work of Cesare's brother Francesco at the height of his career. The style is exactly identical to that of one of the latter's most iconic works, the cycle of four canvases at the sides of the chapel of San Gregorio Armeno in the monastery of the same name in Naples. These were executed between 1635, the date unequivocally placed on the two larger paintings, and 1637, the year in which a payment for the lunettes above was made¹. The two scenes, depicting Gregory the Illuminator restoring King Tiridates to human form on the left and the saint thrown into the well on the right (Figs 2-3), offer an immediate parallel in their organization and typological repertoire that lends support to the paternity of the work under discussion here. We could observe, for example, the slight gigantism of the anatomies and the unmistakable fringes of the heavy draperies, which give these stories the "gypsy-like" air described by Roberto Longhi².

In the figures of the old man on the right, probably Aaron, and the young man bending over at his feet, Fracanzano's invention clearly alludes to the central idea of the so-called *Theoxenia* – or the visit of Bacchus to Icarius – by Jusepe de Ribera, a masterpiece by the Spanish painter that was almost completely lost during a fire in the Alcazar of Madrid in 1734 and known through some old copies and three fragments³ (Fig. 1). This work, belonging to the series of *Customs of Ancient Rome*, executed between Rome and Naples at the behest of the Count of Monterey, is dated for contextual reasons to between 1634 and 1636, thus further confirming

¹ For information on the chapel, cf. Laura Giusti, in Gian Giotto Borrelli, Laura Giusti, *Il patrimonio artistico: dipinti, sculture e restauri*, in *San Gregorio Armeno. Storia, architettura, arte e tradizioni*, ed. by Nicola Spinosa, Aldo Pinto and Adriana Valerio, Naples, 2013, pp. 201-202, cat. no. 10.

² Roberto Longhi, *G.B. Spinelli e i naturalisti napoletani del Seicento*, in "Paragone. Arte", XX, 227, 1969, 227, p. 49.

³ Cf. Philippe Morel, in *Ribera. Ténèbres et lumière*, catalogue of the exhibition (Paris, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Petit Palais, 5 November 2024 – 23 February 2025), ed. by Annick Lemoine and Maïté Metz, Paris, 2024, pp. 164-165, cat. no. 32. Ribera's canvas is in turn based on a classical relief of which several versions exist, the best-known of which was engraved by Antoine Lafréry in 1549.







1. Francesco Fracanzano, *San Gregorio Armeno thrown into the well*, Naples, Church of San Gregorio Armeno

the chronology proposed here for the *Moses*. As is always true of Fracanzano, however, the classical inspiration of the Neo-Venetian movement takes on more rustic and dialectal overtones.

The importance and interest of the painting presented here is enhanced by its provenance. The work seems to depict the Old Testament story of the miracle of the water struck by Moses from Mount Horeb to help the people of Israel, who were thirsty and angry with the Lord⁴. Nonetheless, the moment shown is that in which the miracle is announced, but not yet accomplished. As such, the canvas can be identified, given the identical theme and format, as the “Moses measuring four palms and five with a gilt frame by Ciccio Fracanzano” recorded in 1648 and 1649 in the *post mortem* inventories of the painting gallery of Giuseppe Carafa, Duke of Maddaloni⁵, an illustrious victim of the Neapolitan revolt of 1647⁶. The barbarous desecra-

⁴ Es 17,1-7; Nm 20,2-13.

⁵ Getty Provenance Index®, Archival Inventories, docc. I-39, n. 56, e I-752, n. 3.

⁶ Rosario Villari, *L'uccisione di Giuseppe Carafa*, in *Scritti politici in onore di Luigi Firpo, II: Ricerche sui secoli XVII-XVIII*, ed. by Silvia Rota Ghibaudi and Franco Barcia, Milan, 1990, pp. 323-328.



2. Roman Art, probably 1st Century B.C., *Visit of Bacchus to Icarius*, London British Museum



3. Jusepe de Ribera, *Head of Bacchus* (part), Madrid, Prado Museum





4. Francesco Fracanzano, *Saint Gregory of Armenia heals King Tiridates III*, Naples, Church of San Gregorio Armeno

tion of his corpse, decapitated for his attempt to kill Masaniello – with his brother Diomede –, is depicted in a famous painting by Micco Spadaro mentioned already by the biographer Bernardo De Dominici and now in the Museo di San Martino in Naples⁷. The early date at which the two inventories were drawn up, the reliability of the attributions and the high quality of the works hitherto identified make this nobleman's collection one of the most interesting for an understanding of the 17th century in Naples⁸. Suffice it to consider that it included the extraordinary Luca Forte in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, together with its companion piece in a private Neapolitan collection⁹, the two sumptuous Paceccos – one

⁷ Inv. no. 21681. Bernardo De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani* [...], III, Naples, 1743, p. 198.

⁸ For an informative overview on the collector and his works see Giuseppina Medugno, *Artemisia Gentileschi negli inventari notarili napoletani del XVII e del XVIII secolo*, in *Artemisia Gentileschi a Napoli. Studi e documenti*, ed. by Antonio Ernesto Denunzio and Giuseppe Porzio, Naples, 2023, pp. 124-126.

⁹ For the canvas in the United States (inv. SN715) and its companion piece see Miriam Di Penta, *Una natura*







5. Domenico Gargiulo (Micco Spadaro), *The murder of Don Giuseppe Carafa*, Naples, Certosa and Museum of San Martino

with the collaboration of the animalier Pietro Fiammingo – in the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie in Besançon, and, in the same institution, the iconic *Feast in the Villa of Poggio-reale* by Viviano Codazzi and Micco Spadaro¹⁰. There is no doubt that the *Moses* by Francanzano would be perfectly at ease in such a setting.

GIUSEPPE PORZIO

morta firmata di Luca Forte di provenienza Carafa, in "Paragone. Arte", LXIX, 825 (III s., 142), 2018, pp. 48-56.

¹⁰ For the paintings in Besançon (inv. nos 843.3.10, 843.3.15, 843.3.4), part of the group from the collection of General François-Xavier Donzelot: Nicolas Joyeux, *Les peintures italiennes du Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon. L'œil et la main*, Cinisello Balsamo, 2021, respectively pp. 158-161, cat. nos 53-54 (but mistakenly identifying Pietro Fiammingo as Pieter Boel), and pp. 132-133, cat. no. 39.

THE PENITENT ST PETER

Oil on canvas, 118 × 92 cm

The scene of “St Peter’s tears” was a central theme in Baroque spirituality, supported by a significant literary tradition. For numerous reasons (the preference for figures of old men, its nighttime setting, etc) it enjoyed an extraordinary popularity in 17th-century painting and – in and around Naples – was a particular favourite of Jusepe de Ribera and his circle.

This painting was identified by Erich Schleier, rectifying an earlier attribution to Giovanni Lanfranco, and has been published several times by Nicola Spinosa¹. It is self-evidently among the most characteristic works of Francesco Fracanzano, an important and original artist within the variegated context of Neapolitan naturalism in the second quarter of the 17th century². Unmistakeable, alongside the morphological features and the type of physiognomy, is the ragged manner with which the paint is applied, a highly personal reworking of Ribera’s impasto and of the even rougher style of the anonymous Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds³.

This connection is ascribed by the sources – and developed most amply by Bernardo De Dominici – to an undocumented apprenticeship to Ribera undertaken with his brother

¹ The opinions of the two scholars are provided in the sales catalogue: Sotheby’s, New York, 29 May 2003 (lot 102). For the studies by Spinosa, who published the painting when it was still owned by Giovanni Sarti in Paris, see the bibliography.

² There is still no monograph on Francesco Fracanzano; alongside the classic and systematic study by Giuseppe De Vito, *Perifrasi fracanzaniane*, in *Ricerche sul ’600 napoletano. Saggi e documenti per la storia dell’arte 2003–2004*, Naples, 2004, pp. 93–122 (to whom we refer also for the preceding bibliography) and the commentary by Fabiola Lagalla to the modern edition of the *Vite de’ pittori scultori ed architetti napoletani* by Bernardo De Dominici (ed. by Fiorella Sricchia Santoro and Andrea Zezza, second revised edition, III, Naples, 2017, pp. 152–162), it is worth mentioning among the most recent publications Luigi Coiro, *Un’Incredulità di san Tommaso di Francesco Fracanzano*, in “Kronos”, 14, 2011, pp. 203–210; Aidan Weston-Lewis, *Una obra maestra del dibujo de Francesco Fracanzano*, in “Boletín del Museo del Prado”, XXX, 48, 2012, pp. 89–93; Mario Epifani, *Apertura per la grafica dei fratelli Fracanzano*, in “Paragone. Arte”, LXIV, 759–761 (= III s., 109–110), 2013, pp. 34–51.

³ The information that the Fracanzano brothers were apprenticed to Ribera was already reported by Pietro Antonio Andreini in the *Nota de’ pittori, scultori et architettori, che dall’anno 1640 sino al presente giorno hanno operato lodevolmente nella città et regno di Napoli* [ms, 1675], published by, *Scrittori di storia dell’arte anteriori al De Dominici*, in “Napoli nobilissima”, VIII, 1899, pp. 164–165: 164.





1. Francesco Fracanzano, *Saint Anthony Abbot and Saint Paul the first hermit in the desert*, Naples, Palazzo Arcivescovile

Cesare,⁴; Indeed, the younger Fracanzano brother's substantial corpus of elderly figures and character heads, to which our canvas also belongs, clearly harks back to Ribera's models, of which the painter seems to select and amplify the plebeian and almost grotesque accents⁵.

⁴ Ferdinando Bologna (in *III mostra di restauri*, catalogue of the exhibition [Naples, 1953-1954], Naples, 1953, p. 16, cat. no. 15; Idem, *Francesco Solimena*, Naples 1958, p. 29, note 6) went so far as to suggest, with some acceptance in the scholarship (but erroneously in light of current knowledge), that some works typical of the Master of the Annunciation, such as the *Head of a Man Reading* in the Museo provinciale di Lecce or the two versions of the *Christ Among the Doctors* in the painting gallery of the church of the Gesù Nuovo in Naples and in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes, belonged to the earliest phase of Fracanzano's career. More recently, the young painter has been identified with another figure belonging to the circles of Ribera, the so-called Master of the Christ Among the Doctors (Monica Romano, entry *Fracanzano, Francesco*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XLIV, Rome, 1997, p. 528).

⁵ Thanks specifically to its frankness, contrasting with an unfair dismissal of his brother Cesare, Francesco Fracanzano's rough and plebeian naturalism met, as is known, with lively appreciation from Roberto Longhi, *G.B. Spinelli e i naturalisti napoletani del Seicento*, in "Paragone. Arte", XX, 227, 1969, pp. 48-49.





Early writers were well-aware of this stylistic trait and the aforementioned De Dominici even identified its origins, entirely fancifully, in the financial precarity besetting the two Fracanzano brothers, with repercussions on their choice of topics and techniques of execution⁶.

A very important parallel with which to contextualize our painting – in terms of approach and style – is the incomplete series of robust *Apostles* – ten, including the Christ the Redeemer – in the sacristy of the church of San Pasquale Baylon in Taranto, and in particular the *Judas Isacriot*⁷; the similarities are so strong that our *St Peter* seems to belong to the same cycle.

Such images must also have been crucial for the development of Salvator Rosa's style and his repertoire of wild and gloomy figures, deep in thought (Rosa was famously the brother-in-law of Francesco, who married his sister Giovanna in 1632).

It is difficult to date the painting exactly given the few available chronological reference points. However, the execution of *St Peter*, still modelled on the half-length figures of Caravaggio's late period, appears to belong to the phase in which Fracanzano was most explicitly dependent on Ribera. This period of his art is represented by the canvas with *Sts Paul and Anthony the Hermits* formerly in Sant'Onofrio dei Vecchi in Naples and currently in the archbishop's palace, whose date next to the artist's signature should probably be read 1634⁸.

GIUSEPPE PORZIO

⁶ Bernardo De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori scultori ed architetti napoletani*, III, Naples, 1743 (but ca. 1745), p. 85; on the true financial status of the Fracanzano family see Lagalla's commentary to the aforementioned modern edition of the *Vite*, p. 152, note 1.

⁷ Massimo Guastella, in *Il Barocco a Lecce e nel Salento*, catalogue of the exhibition (Lecce, 1995), Rome, 1995, pp. 55-56, cat. nos 23-26.

⁸ For this reading of the date (the third numeral is uncertain), generally accepted by the later literature, see the entry by Angela Schiattarella, in *Civiltà del Seicento a Napoli*, catalogue of the exhibition (Naples, 1984-1985), I, Naples, 1984, p. 285, cat. no. 2.97.

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Oil on canvas, 130 × 155 cm

The subject of this painting, drawn from the Old Testament, is the patriarch Joseph as he avoids advances of the wife of the Egyptian Potiphar, an official of the pharaoh who had bought the young Jew as a slave, later making him master of his household¹. When Jacob rejected her, the woman falsely accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, using as proof his garment that she had kept, thus leading to his arrest. A fairly common theme in Baroque painting, in part for its erotic undertones, this is one of the rare episodes from Biblical history in which the power relations between the sexes seem to be reversed.

The painting is known to scholars, albeit only through the black and white photograph published in the catalogue of the exhibition held in 1964 by the Relarte auction house at its headquarters in Palazzetto Serbelloni in Milan. The short text accompanying the illustration already placed the canvas in a precise context: “The exceptional quality of this work reveals the artist’s early meditations on Caravaggio, encouraged in Naples by Artemisia Gentileschi. At the same time, it presents a web of elegant rhythms that will later lead Pacecco to approach the output of Stanzone, culminating in an open espousal of classicism”². The attribution to Giovan Francesco Di Rosa, called Pacecco, was accepted in all of the subsequent literature, which – starting with Raffaello Causa – always placed the canvas in the Molinari Pradelli collection³, through this is not confirmed by the documentation on the work.

Accepted and further developed in the monograph by Vincenzo Pacelli⁴, the attribution to Pacecco today, almost twenty years later, seems in need of correction in favour of his stepfather Filippo Vitale, among the first and most robust Neapolitan naturalists of the 17th century. Indeed, the observations regarding the Caravaggesque roots of the *Joseph* and the connection

¹ Gen. 39, 7–18.

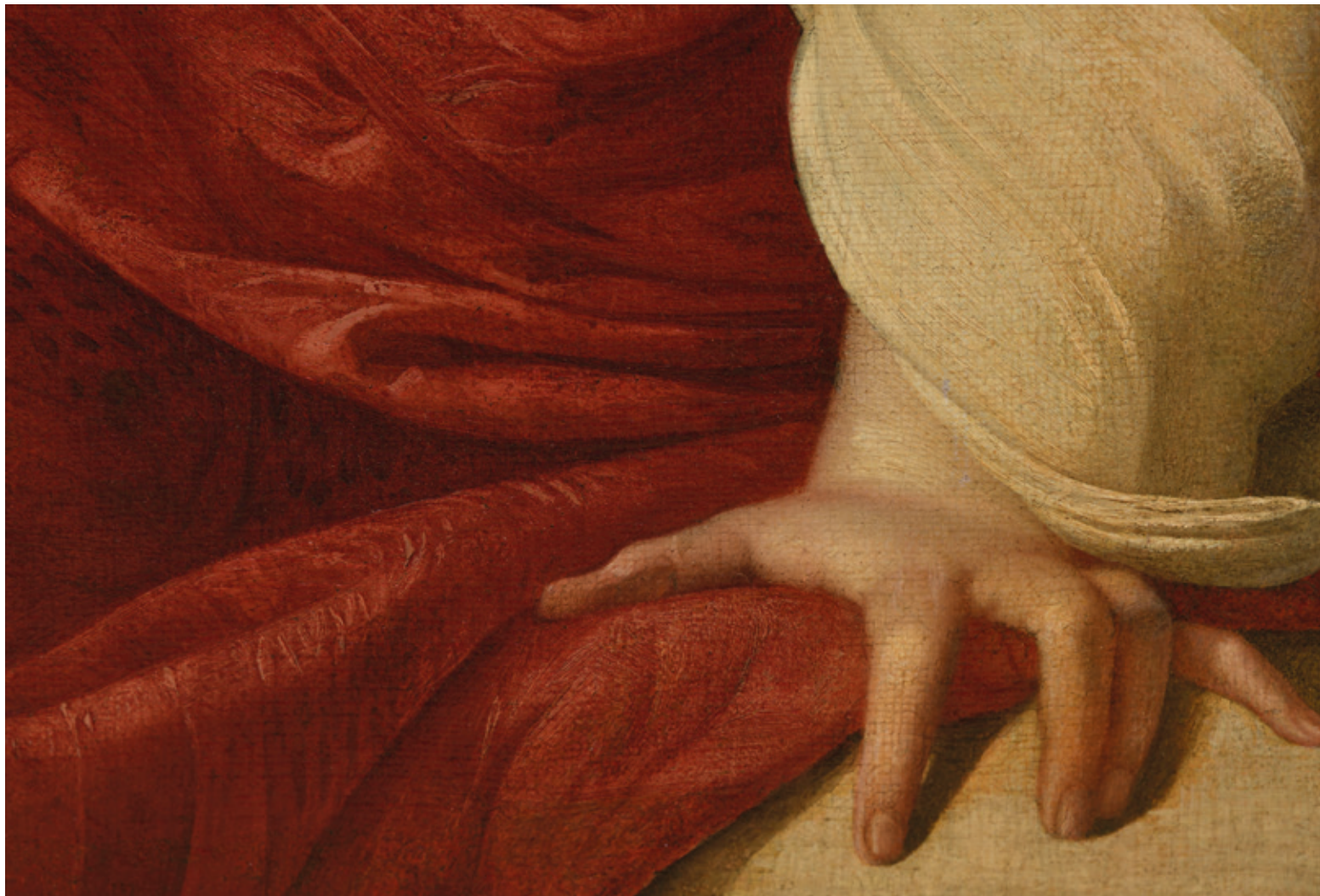
² *Maestri italiani del '600 e '700*, catalogue of the exhibition (Milan, 1964), Milan, 1964, pp. 82–83, Plt. 39. The text is also reported on the typewritten entry glued onto the back of the photograph in the Fototeca Zeri (inv. no. 108670), which attests its previous provenance from the Ortolani collection in Rome.

³ Raffaello Causa, *La pittura del Seicento a Napoli dal naturalismo al Barocco*, in *Storia di Napoli*, V/2, Naples 1972, p. 988, note 135, fig. 326.

⁴ Vincenzo Pacelli, in Idem, *Giovan Francesco De Rosa detto Pacecco De Rosa. 1607–1656*, Naples 2008, pp. 356–357, cat. no. 94.







proposed on several occasions with Battistello Caracciolo's interpretation of the same subject in the painting in the Rau Foundation of Zurich, have always pointed to an artist with an earlier cultural background⁵. Dating to this time is a substantial and coherent group of works also previously ascribed to Pacecco, outstanding examples of which are – for the similar composition and style – the well-known image of the Duke of Guise between the Virgin of Carmel and St Louis of Toulouse in a private collection in Naples, the canvas with *St Cecilia and St Valerian Crowned by an Angel With St Tiburtius* now owned by Porcini (Fig. 1) and the *Judith Decapitating Holofernes* in the Musée Fabre in Montpellier⁶ (Fig. 2).

From the late 1620s, in the wake of the stylistic transformations of Jusepe de Ribera and Massimo Stanzione, Vitale developed an elegant and enriched version of the severe naturalism of his early works, intensifying his colour palette and specializing in the illusionistic rendering of lustrous damasks and other valuable fabrics, a virtuoso talent of which the canvas under discussion here offers one of the most eloquent and effective examples. This stylistic formula, destined for a certain commercial success and often applied by combining a variety of techniques, was absorbed wholesale into the style of his stepson Pacecco. The latter held an increasingly important position in the management of the Vitale workshop (strongly familial in nature, as clarified by the documents), ultimately even supplanting Vitale, forgotten for almost three centuries, in the literary and historical tradition.

In recent years, the difficulty in distinguishing between the two painters has become one of the problems most debated by connoisseurs of 17th-century Neapolitan painting, with often changeable and provisional results. In this specific case, there are sound arguments supporting the attribution of its ideation and execution to the older master alone. These are its solid organization, the peculiarly acute realism and the matronly figure of the protagonist, worthy of the repertoire of Gentileschi, whose name, not coincidentally, was already mentioned in the Relarte catalogue entry. As concerns the meaning of this rapport, there can be no doubt that Gentileschi herself must in turn have looked with interest at such models during her time in southern Italy.

GIUSEPPE PORZIO

⁵ Stefano Causa, in *Battistello Caracciolo e il primo naturalismo a Napoli*, catalogue of the exhibition (Naples, 1991-1992), ed. by F. Bologna, Naples 1991, p. 228, cat. no. I.17; Idem, *Battistello Caracciolo. L'opera completa*, Naples, 2000, p. 187, cat. A53.

⁶ Inv. no. 2020.34.1. On this group of paintings see now Giuseppe Porzio, *Uno sguardo sul Seicento a Napoli*, Naples, 2024, pp. 18-31, cat. no. 2.



*Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld**Biberach an der Riß 1609 – Augsburg 1684*

IDEALISED PORTRAIT OF A SOLDIER

Oil on canvas, 73.5 × 59.5 cm

Signed (lower left): JH SCHÖNFELD

Appeared on Naples' antique market at the beginning of last decade and later entered the Koelliker collection (inv. LK0577), our painting is already known to literature.¹ If the stylistic features of our artwork confirm the authorship even before the discovery of the signature, brought to light during the 2002 restoration, this is a quite unique painting in the vast catalogue of Schönhofeld, one of the greatest German painters of the 17th century and the most popular even outside the immediate circle of experts.² The subject is far from the conspicuous catalogue of his typical historic Biblical and mythological scenes depicting mainly triplets, – the “seriose Historien, Poetische Fabeln, Alludien und Pastorellen” recalled by Joachim von Sandrart – that the artist had fine-tuned during his twenty-years long stay in Italy between Rome and Naples from the beginning of the 1630s to mid-17th century³.

The strong image of this severe elderly soldier,⁴ despite his facial features he is most likely

¹ Dieter Graf, in *Mola e il suo tempo. Pittura di figura a Roma dalla Collezione Koelliker*, exhibition catalogue ed. by F. Petrucci (Ariccia, Palazzo Chigi), Milan 2005, pp. 208-210, no. 52; Id., in *Luce e ombra nella pittura italiana tra Rinascimento e Barocco. Da Tiziano a Bernini*, exhibition catalogue ed. by V. Sgarbi (São Paulo, Pinacoteca do Estado; Rio de Janeiro, Paço Imperial), Milan 2006, pp. 114-115, 136, no. 52.

² On the painting, see the classic monographies by Hermann Voss (*Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld. Ein schwäbischer Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Biberach an der Riß 1964) and Herbert Pée (*Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld. Die Gemälde*, Berlin 1971), and the more recent study by Cécile Michaud focused on the master's Italian activity: *Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld. Un peintre allemand du XVII^e siècle en Italie*, Munich 2006. And again: *Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld. Welt der Götter, Heiligen und Heldenmythen*, exhibition catalogue ed. by U. Zeller, Maren Waïke and Hans-Martin Kaulbach (Friedrichshafen, Zeppelin-Museum; Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie), Cologne 2009; *Maler von Welt. Johann Heinrich Schönhofeld im Bestand der Kunstsammlungen und Museen Augsburg*, exhibition catalogue ed. by C. Trepesch (Augsburg, Schaezlerpalais), Berlin-Munich 2010.

³ Joachim von Sandrart, *L'Academia Toderca della Architectura, Scultura & Pittura. Oder Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, II/3, Nuremberg 1675, p. 328.

⁴ As Antonio Tosini of the Restoration Department of the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte told me, the subject of the portrait, once – wrongly – presented as a knight, is wearing a quite ancient half armor (maybe conceived for fencing) and holding a broadsword, used by infantry to open passages in the enemy lines and already into disuse in the mid-XVII century; the headgear as well in unfashionable: most likely a burgonet of the end of the XVI century.





Luca Giordano, *Idealised portrait of soldier (Mars)*, private collection

an idealized model belongs to the iconographic group of soldiers depicted half- or full-length. These had become a popular subject especially in Northern Europe (Jan van Bijlert, Hendrick ter Brugghen) and in Italy, particularly in Rome and Naples in Pier Francesco Mola and Salvatore Rosa's milieu, but also in Venice: in this city, around the same years of Schönfeld's (he went there around 1651 on his way back to his homeland) the genre had been reinterpreted from its roots in the style of Giorgione to Pietro Della Vecchia's so-called *bravi*.⁵

Therefore, if until now scholars have underlined our author's relation with Rosa, undoubtedly among Schönfeld's mental reference points – especially for his famous *Self-portrait*

⁵ A northern European example can be Van Bijlert's canvas in Pasadena (CA), Norton Simon Museum (inv. M.1978.18.P): Paul Huys Janssen, *Jan van Bijlert. 1597/98–1671. Catalogue raisonné*, Amsterdam 1998, pp. 140–141, no. 109 and pl. 64. On Vecchia's 'Giorgionesque' images of soldiers, see Bernd Aikema, *Pietro Della Vecchia and the heritage of the Renaissance in Venice*, Florence 1990, particularly pp. 67–68.

wearing an armor, part of the Chigi Saracini collection –,⁶ the comparison with another ideal warrior figure, which could be interpreted as a Mars, recently ascribed to Luca Giordano's mid-17th century neo-Venetian period, is even more appropriate.⁷

As said at the beginning, this is a rare yet not isolated subject of the German painter's *corpus*: another *Soldier* with armor and sword, with a quite similar structure, is conserved in the Kroměříž Art Museum (inv. O 369);⁸ and the canvas with *Marco Curzio* – the legendary Roman knight who sacrificed his life for the *Res publica* – of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (inv. GG 2265) could also be connected with ours due to their conceptual similarity. The mark 1655, next to the signature in both compositions, represents a reference point to date our painting⁹.

GIUSEPPE PORZIO

⁶ Caterina Volpi, *Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). Pittore famoso*, Rome 2014, p. 469, no. 148.

⁷ Giuseppe Porzio, *A Roman Judith and rediscovered paintings from the kingdom of Naples*, Naples 2016, pp. 52-59, no. 6.

⁸ Pée, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142, no. 74, and pl. 83; and lastly Eckhard Leuschner, in *Johann Heinrich Schönfeld cit.*, pp. 206-207, no. 51 (with year 1655 indicated). The connection with our *Soldier* was already in Graf's document mentioned in note 1.

⁹ Pée, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141, no. 73, and pl. 82.

CABINET

Wood veneered in ebony, painted glass and gilt bronze supports, 49 x 63 x 29 cm

The structure of the cabinet is completely veneered in ebony and the front of each drawer is adorned with painted and gilded glass panels. That in the centre depicts *Hercules and the Hydra* while at the sides are various scenes, in all likelihood inspired by the engravings in the first illustrated edition of Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) printed in Genoa in 1590. The edition comprised twenty prints preceding each canto, engraved by Agostino Carracci and Giacomo Franco after drawings executed in 1586 by Bernardo Castello.

Starting at the top left, the glass panel depicting the combat between two warriors was probably based on a similar subject present in the background of the plate with *Erminia Among the Shepherds* (Fig. 1); the second episode with Arab and Christian warriors may be inspired by the engraving in which we see *Suleyman Leads the Arabs in the Attack on Jerusalem* (Fig. 2); the third painting probably refers to the moment in which *The Sultan of Egypt Calls the Generals to Arms* (Fig. 3). In the middle row and then in that below the figures present in the other scenes (again starting from the left) appear to be freely inspired by some details visible in the prints depicting the *Procession of the Christians at the Mount of Olives* (Fig. 4), *Alete and Argante, Ambassadors of the King of Egypt, Speak to Godfrey of Bouillon* (Fig. 5) and the *First Combat at Jerusalem* (Fig. 6).

Engravings, especially from Germany, were the preferred source of inspiration for two painters on glass whose biographies have been reconstructed by Elisa Ambrosio: known thanks to the initials (WBL and VBL) of their names placed at the bottom of some painted glass panels, the scholar expanded the monograms to form the names of the Swiss painters Wolfgang Bieler (or Bucler, who was born in 1583 and died before 1650) and his son Victor (born on 12 December 1605). The latter learned the refined technique of painting on glass panels embellished with the application of engraved gold leaf, called "Amelierung" or "verre eglomisé", in his father's workshop. He later perfected his art at Zurich in the circles of the master Sprungli and at Freiburg, where the young artist is documented until 1625. After this date the painter moved to Rome, where he was known by the Italianized name of Vittorio Billa (or Biller, or as Viktor Bieler). He subsequently settled in Naples where he married Maria Mosca in 1650. Here, thanks to his contacts with the city's art world, he opened his own studio which probably remained active until 1656, the year of the great plague that decimated the population of Naples.





1. *Erminia Among the Shepherds*



2. *Suleyman attacks Jerusalem*



3. *The Sultan of Egypt Calls the Generals to Arms*



4. *Procession of the Christians at the Mount of Olives*



5. *Alete and Argante, Ambassadors of the King of Egypt, Speak to Godfrey of Bouillon*



6. *First Combat at Jerusalem*

The painting style of the glass panels and the extensive use of engraved gold leaf for the garments of the figures depicted on our piece of furniture are clearly closely related to the works initialled by Vicktor Bieler and executed during his years in Naples and in particular to the panel with *David Rebuked by Nathan* in the Museo di San Martino (Fig. 7). The lively and sophisticated touch typical of Bieler's works can also be seen in two other pieces of furniture, with wooden surfaces veneered in tortoiseshell, which have appeared at auction: these are a cabinet depicting the stories of St Paul (Fig. 8) sold at auction by Sotheby's in London in May





7. Vicktor Bieler, *David Rebuked by Nathan and Cain Killing Abel*, Naples, Museo di San Martino



2002¹ and a small casket (Fig. 9) whose drawers are adorned with six small glass plaques with biblical episodes². Our cabinet is thus further precious evidence of the vitality of Neapolitan artisanship during the 17th century, when painters, woodcarvers and cabinetmakers were summoned by wealthy local patrons to execute furniture and interior decorations that made ample use of precious materials and original paintings.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ Sotheby's auction, London, May 2002, lot 5.

² Finarte auction, Rome, March 2007, lot 1366.



8. Vicktor Bieler (attr.), *Cabinet with stories of St Paul*, private collection



9. Vicktor Bieler (attr.), *Casket with biblical scenes*, private collection



PAIR OF OCTAGONAL FRAMES

Embossed copper, coral and glass painted in imitation of lapis lazuli, 15 x 12 cm

These two small octagonal frames in gilt copper with pieces of coral applied using the *retroincastro* technique and enamel rosettes enclose two little glass panels painted in imitation of lapis lazuli. This procedure became fashionable in the Neoclassical period, when it was decided to embellish this pair of ornaments with the dazzling blue of lapis lazuli, contrasting with the intense red of the corals set into the gilt copper.

The octagonal shape and lacy metal decoration embellished with coral rosettes of these frames replicate the models popular among the master craftsmen of Trapani starting from the early 17th century for the creation of precious devotional plaques hosting figures of saints inserted into elaborate perspectives. The decoration of these ornaments was not limited to the front part alone, but also extended to the back. Here the copper sheet enclosing them was engraved, as in our case, with floral motifs to obtain a highly refined effect that could be appreciated when the object was not hung up but displayed as a rare and exquisite collector's item.

Already assigned to the Trapani area by Enzo Tartamella, who dated them generically to the 18th century, our ornaments have justly been redated by Lucia Ajovalasit to the mid-17th century¹. Indeed, the stylistic similarities to the numerous devotional plaques dated by Laura Marino² to the first half of the 17th century suggest that our two frames were executed at a slightly later period, using decorative schemes that had by this time entered the ornamental repertoire of Trapani's highly skilled artisans.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ Enzo Tartamella, *Corallo*, Maroda Editrice, 1985, p. 311; Lucia Ajovalasit, *Coralli*, Novecento, 1989, p. 227

² On this see the examples published by Laura Marino in Valeria Patrizia Li Vegni, Maria Concetta di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, eds, *I grandi capolavori del corallo. I coralli di Trapani del XVII e XVIII secolo*, catalogue of the exhibition, Catania 2013, pp. 78 – 95.







8.

Trapani, mid 17th century

SHRINE

Gilded copper, coral, enamel, 29.5 x 24.5 cm

The octagonal plaque has a convex external frame and a concave internal one, both covered with coral fuses placed in parallel with small white enamel corollas on the corners. The copper plate falls slightly into a central niche above a horizontal caesura. Inside the niche are the carved figures of the Holy Family surmounted by small angels; outside, on the demarcation line, three figures of worshipers are placed while below appear the ox and the donkey with other herds. Musician, angels and cherubs fly above the niche. The external profile is enriched with an openwork motif with enamel highlights and double corollas that combine the enamel with coral, materials used in the rich attachment with a cherub. The reverse has engraved scroll motifs.

In Sicily, the term *capezzale* indicates this type of devotional image which was usually hung next to the headboard of the bed. The subjects depicted in these plaques made with coral, copper and enamels could contemplate one or more figures and were often articulated, as in our case, by the slight concavity of the background panel often equipped, as also happens here, with a niche in order to give an illusion of perspective depth.

This expedient is, in our example, augmented by the progressive shrinking of the figures of worshipers on the sides of the Holy Family, placed on a sort of step that acts as a horizon.

From the same workshop that prepared the example presented here is an *capezzale* of similar dimensions but with a less convincing distribution of the figures at the bottom and top: the carvings of the Virgin and Saint Joseph are identical between the two examples, as is the external fretwork.¹ The same perforated embellishment in coral and enamel can be found on the outside of a plaque from the Romano collection (Palermo): in that case it is a twelve-sided shape with a niche in the center hosting the Immaculate Conception and two smaller figures of Saint Francis and Saint Catherine in a background which, as in our example, alludes to a

¹ Semenzato, Roma li 7 ottobre 1988, lot. 465. Today in Banca Popolare di Novara; see Valeria Li Vigni, Maria Concetta Di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, *I grandi capolavori del corallo, I coralli di Trapani del VI e XVIII secolo*, exhibition cat, Cinisello Balsamo 2013, cat.22.





perspective vision, indicative of greater attention to the typically Baroque taste which allows us to date these works to the mid 17th century.²

ROBERTO VALERIANI

² *Coralli talismani sacri e profani*, exhibition cat. ed. by Corrado Maltese, 1986, cat.76.



9.

Trapani, second half of the 17th century

CRUCIFIX

Gilded copper, coral, semiprecious stones, silver, enamel, 62 x 31 cm

Provenance: Beloeil, Princes of Ligne Collection. Catania, Private Collection

The cross has a surface covered with coral lozenges with five large coral and silver corollas; a beading runs across the profiles; at the end of three arms are openwork and enamel scrolls with silver-winged cherubs and coral heads; the lower end has six embossed silver leaves. The *corpus* has the titulus crucis above and Adam's skull at the foot, both in coral. On the back, the copper plate engraved with motifs of ascending leaves that expand into scrolls on the arms and upper section; nine cabochon stones are set within bezels, accompanied by five cameos with heads and a carved coral head.

The base consists of two inverted brackets covered with comma elements and bearing three filigree, stone, and enamel applications. Underneath is a double order of coral spools, and the whole is held up by four eagle's legs.

The prestigious provenance of this work¹ offers some interesting documentary insights. The group of coral artifacts formed by Claude Lamoral I, third Prince of Ligne (1618-1679) can in fact be considered one of the richest and most sumptuous collections of Sicilian coral works of the Baroque age, investigated albeit partially since 1964 by Antonio Daneu.

Member of an ancient and illustrious family linked to the Spanish crown, the Prince was appointed by Philip IV in 1669 Viceroy of Sicily, a position he actively assumed from 1670 to 1674 and then moved to Milan in the role of Governor until 1678. Both he and his consort, Claire-Marie de Nassau-Siegen (1621-1695), were avid purchasers of both sacred and secular coral works: among these were two coral, silver and semi-precious stone cabinets (now on loan to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts along with other items from the same collection)². Daneu traced some payments related to the workers who intervened in those cabinets and other papers: among them is a payment to "Don Diego Casto [Castro] pour 2 crucifix et une Notre-dame de corail" dated January 29, 1671. However, we cannot be certain that the invoice

¹ Bibliography: Antonio Daneu, *L'arte del corallo trapanese*, Palermo, 1964, pl. 20b. Valeria Li Vigni, Maria Concetta Di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, *I grandi capolavori del corallo, I coralli di Trapani del VII e XVIII secolo*, exhibition catalogue, Cinisello Balsamo 2013, pp. 46-47, no. 16.

² Antonio Daneu, *L'arte trapanese del corallo*, Palermo, 1964, pp. 97-101; Mario Tavella, "Two Coral Cabinets made for Claude Lamoral I, Prince de Ligne et Viceroy de Sicile", in *The Burlington Magazine*, 156, n.1336, July 2014.





is related to the work presented here, and it should also be specified that by the term “crucifix,” only the figure of Christ was perhaps meant. Among the names traced by Daneu in the papers of Beloeil’s archives frequently appear the names of the “coralliste” Andrea Soli, of Fernando Afflitto “pour des agathes” and of Jean George, a goldsmith, capable of carving lapis lazuli.³

Recent researches by Francesco Gabriele Polizzi brought to light other documents and identified the goldsmith Jean George in the German goldsmith active in Palermo Giovanni Giorgio Stella, responsible for the stone inlays on the cabinets.⁴

A feature particularly rare and notable in our specimen is the exceptional finishing of the back of the cross with an unusual profusion of semiprecious stones (amethysts, spinels, topazes) and the cameos with a rare iconography that refers to ancient carvings. It should be mentioned that the two cabinets in the collection at Beloeil, now in Boston, also have semi-precious stone inserts on the sides.

Commenting on this crucifix Daneu pointed out the three jewels applied to the base, an ancient addition that made the whole even more precious. Daneu considered the base itself ancient but not maybe the original one: however, in recent times other crucifixes have been identified that share the identical elegant architectural motif of the coral-finely encrusted brackets: one was in the Church of San Paolo in Messina (now in the Maria Accascina Regional Interdisciplinary Museum) and others in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Messina. This has led scholars to formulate the hypothesis that all these works, including the one under consideration here, came from the same Messina workshop and to suggest that this workshop may be linked to the name of the coral carver Pietro Ciotta, from Trapani, who opened a workshop in Messina in the late seventeenth century.⁵

ROBERTO VALERIANI

³ Daneu *cit.*, pp. 112-113.

⁴ Francesco Gabriele Polizzi, «*Plus curieux que beaux*’. *Artisti di corallo per Claude Lamoral I, terzo Principe di Ligne e Viceré di Sicilia*», in *Artificia Siciliae. Arti decorative siciliane e collezionismo europeo nell’età degli Asburgo*, a cura di M.C. Di Natale, Milano, 2016, pp.166-195 (with previous bibliography by the same author).

⁵ Li Vigni, Di Natale, Abbate, *cit.* in bibliography, cat. 50.

TRIUMPH WITH ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Embossed and gilt copper, silver and corals, 46 cm

This precious object is composed of a wooden base completely covered in gilt copper to which pieces of coral have been applied, forming a decoration of scroll motifs surrounding small flowers. Around the top of the base is a coral balustrade within which stands the plinth for a chariot drawn by a pair of horses driven by a putto. On its top stands St Michael the Archangel brandishing his sword and shield, while at the centre is another putto holding a silver banner in both hands with the legend “QUIS UT DEUS”. Behind the chariot is a branch of coral whose complex offshoots form a tree to whose branches flowers in coral, gilt copper and silver have been applied.

This is a sophisticated artefact with parallels in other similar works studied by Maria Concetta di Natale¹, like the triumphal chariots of St Rosalia and St Michael in the Museo del Bargello in Florence but originating from the Canevaro collection, or the work, fairly similar to ours, now in a private collection in Catania (Fig. 1). Both the aforementioned scholar and Vincenzo Abbate² consider these compositions to be direct descendants of the Baroque creations of Paolo and Giacomo Amato, inspired particularly by works in Palermo such as the monument to Philip IV of 1661 or the Garaffo fountain, executed by Gioacchino Vitagliano to designs by the two Amato. We should also mention the staging of the triumphs of the emperors in the Cathedral in 1686 to the precise instructions of Paolo Amato and that in 1686, again following the directions of the architects, the coral-worker from Trapani Vito Bova executed a triumph in coral with the figure of Charles II, discovered in his workshop after his death and of which a version survives in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia³. The very form of the chariot, with its over-exuberant coral scrollwork, derives from the chariots in the form of ships executed

¹ Maria Concetta di Natale, *Oro, argento e corallo tra committenza ecclesiastica e devozione laica*, in Maria Concetta di Natale, ed., *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti Decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2000 (Charta Milano 2001), pp. 60 - 61

² Vincenzo Abbate, *Le vie del corallo: maestranze, committenti e cultura artistica in Sicilia tra il Sei e il Settecento*, in *L'arte del corallo in Sicilia*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 1986, pp. 310 - 311

³ On the version in Palermo see the information provided in the entry by Vincenzo Abbate, in Vincenzo Abbate, ed., *Wunderkammer siciliana alle origini del museo perduto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2001, pp. 125 - 127; for the documentation on the artefact formerly in the Bova workshop see the documents reported by M. Serraino, *Trapani nella vita civile e religiosa*, Trapani 1968, p. 113





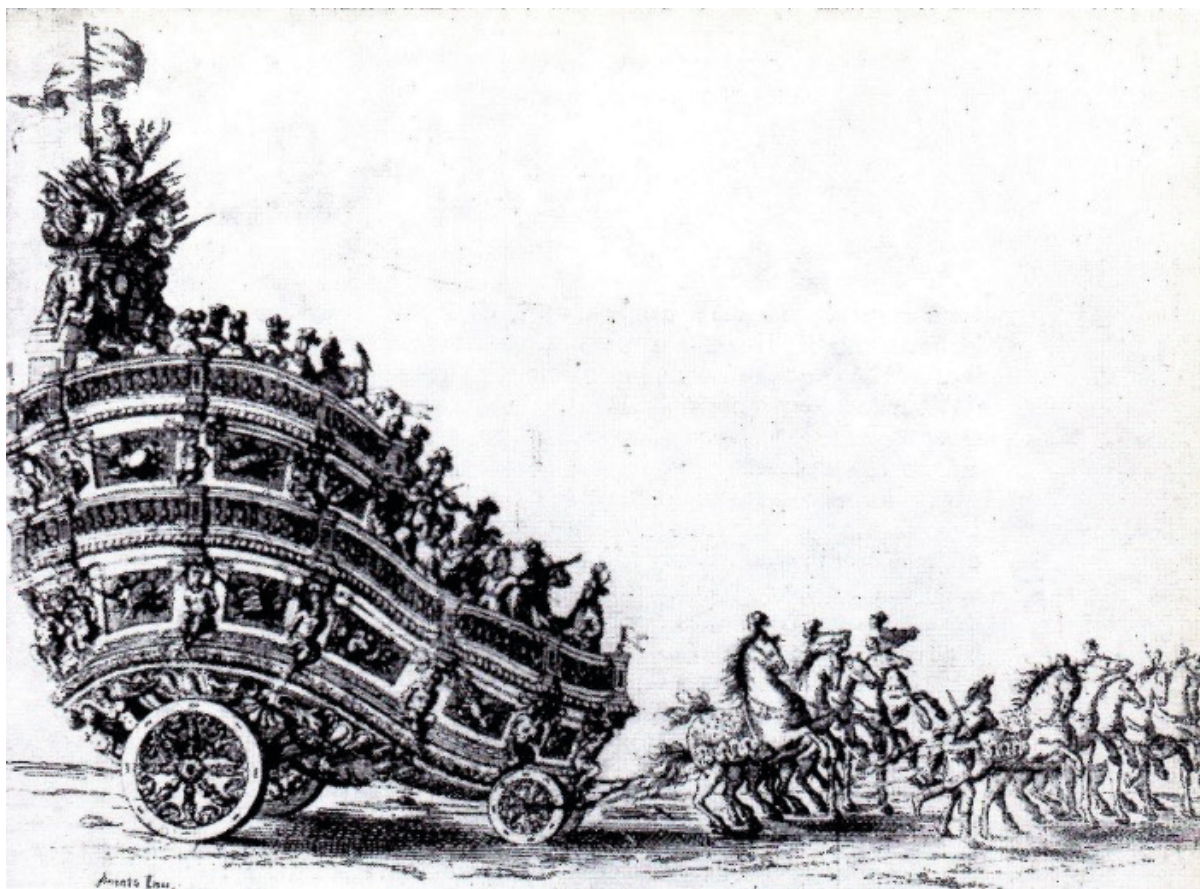
1. Master craftsmen from Trapani, *Triumph with the Archangel Michael*, late 17th c., Private collection



by Sicilian master craftsmen for the triumphs used during the city's spectacular festivals and designed by Paolo and Giacomo Amato towards the end of the 17th century (Fig. 2), or a lace-making pattern with the glorification of the Christian virtues⁴. Analysing a similar triumph with the chariot of Apollo – the Sun (Fig. 3) in the Whitaker Foundation in Palermo, Maria Concetta di Natale reports the names of some coral-workers from Trapani. One is that of Ippolito Ciotta, who in 1680 sold Antonio Grassellino of Palermo two triumphal chariots, one with St Francis Xavier and the other with St Francis de Paul on the ship. Another is the coral sculptor Vito De Bono, who executed a “machine” with St Rosalia that the scholar suggests identifying as the group now in the Bargello.⁵

⁴ One of these pieces of lace was published by Maria Concetta Di Natale, op. cit. 2000, p. 62

⁵ See the entry by the scholar in Valeria Patrizia Li Vigni, Maria Concetta di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, eds, *I grandi capolavori del corallo. I coralli di trapani del XVII e XVIII secolo*, catalogue of the exhibition, Catania 2013, p. 144



2. P. Amato, *Triumphal chariot for the festival of St Rosalia in 1693*

In the context of the fervent religious spirit that possessed the Sicilian aristocracy, as has been remarked⁶, monumental compositions such as these were executed to disseminate the figures of specific saints in accordance with the dictates of Counter-Reformation propaganda. In our case, the saint is the Archangel Michael who, as commander of the celestial hosts, was considered the symbol of the Catholic church's struggle against heretics. The choice to include the spectacular flowering tree behind the chariot may also allude to a renewed rebirth of the faith that is regenerated and gains renewed vigour through divine intervention, just as nature is reborn in spring in all its beauty of flowers and leaves.

For its elaborate and monumental structure this work can be included among those majestic coral artefacts intended to embellish the residences of princes and sovereigns, like the famous *Coral Mountain* purchased in 1570 in Trapani on behalf of the viceroy of Sicily, don Francesco Ferdinando d'Avalos, who sent it as a gift to Philip II of Spain, or the later, astonishing composition dedicated to St Rosalia sent by the Senate of Palermo as a gift to Pope Urban

⁶ See the entry by Rita Vadala in Valeria Patrizia Li Vigni, Maria Concetta di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, eds, *I grandi capolavori del corallo. I coralli di trapani del XVII e XVIII secolo*, catalogue of the exhibition, Catania 2013, p. 143 with preceding bibliography.





3. Master craftsmen from Trapani,
Triumph with Apollo – the Sun.
Late 17th c., Palermo, Whitaker
Foundation

VIII in 1631. Finally, we should add that for such important works, during the 17th century and the early decades of the following century, master coral workers often made use, as in our triumph, of large branches of natural coral, rendered valuable by their rarity and thus intended to arouse the marvel of their fortunate owners⁷.

This sophisticated triumph with its sumptuous coral ornamentation typical of the coral workers active in Trapani between the 17th and 18th centuries thus belongs to that lively cultural climate descending from the Baroque that became prevalent on the island from the late 17th century. At this time Palermo and Trapani engaged in a fruitful artistic and cultural exchange, leading to the creation of extraordinarily sophisticated works of which our ornament represents a sublime example.

ENRICO COLLE

⁷ Vincenzo Abbate, *Corallo: "L'arte di lavorare con tal finezza in materia sì difficile"*, in Vincenzo Abbate, ed., *Wunderkammer siciliana alle origini del museo perduto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2001, p.58.



11.

Palermo, second half of the 17th century

CABINET

Wood veneered in ebonized wood and tortoiseshell with gilt copper, coral and enamel applications, Cabinet 62.5 x 106.5 x 39 cm; Table 91 x 113 x 43 cm

This architectural cabinet consists of a central pediment supported by a pair of Solomonic columns flanked on each side by a row of drawers and a door, also surmounted by a small pediment. Each door has a niche with an allegorical figure carved in coral inside. The entire structure is veneered in ebonized wood and tortoiseshell, while the fronts of the drawers and doors are adorned with small panels of gilt copper embellished with coral applications made using a procedure fashionable in Trapani starting from the late 16th century and called “a tappeto”. It was achieved using small fragments of coral worked en cabochon and inserted into the metal with the technique known as *retroincastrò*.

This working method, aimed at exalting the bright colour of the coral against the back-



1. Gina Lollobrigida in her house with the cabinet in the background, © Getty Images News, photographer Marco di Lauro





2. Trapani workshop, *Cabinet*, first half of the 17th century, Catania, private collection



3. Palermo workshop, *Casket*, early 18th century, Palermo, Palazzo Mirto

ground of the gilt panels, is characteristic of the master craftsmen from Trapani who employed it over the centuries to embellish artefacts of various types, especially cabinets of a type represented in various Sicilian museums and numerous private collections¹. Specifically, the decorative motif with corals radiating outwards from a central rosette like the petals of a flower to cover the whole metal surface is very similar to that present on some pieces published by Maurizio Vitella² and dated to between the late 16th century and the first half of the 17th century (Fig. 2).

Likewise, the use on the part of artisans from Trapani and later Palermo of fine sheets of tortoiseshell to complete the furnishings made by local workshops is typical of the sumptuous taste established in Sicily during the second half of the 17th century. It is illustrated, for example, by the caskets in Palazzo Mirto that like our cabinet rest on 19th-century supports, also executed in Palermo (Fig. 3). A testimony to the luxurious furnishings of Sicilian residences, our cabinet has been further embellished by the insertion of enamel rosettes and small coral sculptures placed inside the niches in the doors, in accordance with a custom that we also see in many of the furnishings for devotional use produced in Trapani.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ Enrico Colle, *Il mobile Barocco in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1600 al 1738*, Milan 2000, p. 50.

² Maurizio Vitella, *I grandi capolavori del corallo. I coralli di Trapani del XVII e XVIII secolo*, catalogue of the exhibition, Catania 2013, pp. 67 – 70.





12.

Giovanni Rassanelli called il Fiorentino (attr.), late 17th century

EMBROIDERED FLOUNCE

Velvet embroidered with gold and silver thread and coral beads, 20.5 x 221 cm

This piece of embroidery belongs to a type of artefacts made principally in Trapani, Messina and Palermo, generally consisting of textiles intended for altar frontals or the backs of the baldachins placed in the reception rooms of Sicily's most important aristocratic residences. They present an exuberant embroidered decoration, made using gold and silver thread and small coral beads, arranged on a backing of damask or velvet in accordance with the stylistic indications provided in the cartoons previously created by the greatest ornamentalists of the period¹.

While the embroideries made for Sicilian aristocratic residences have largely been lost, several altar frontals survive as a testimony to the degree of perfection attained by local embroiderers and to the flourishing production of such textile decorations on the island. These works are inspired by the architectural designs of palace facades or the loggias opening onto luxuriant gardens, where the display of precious materials used for the embroidery matched the opulent taste of the island's wealthy patrons. Elvira D'Amico has discovered among the archive papers the names of some of these artisans, active during the 17th century. They include the embroiderers Salvatore Giordano, Giuseppe Roccaforte and Giuseppe Lanfusa, from whom Lady Felice Caccamo e Orioles ordered some hangings embroidered in coral in 1655. Also made of coral were others, no longer in use and kept in a trunk in Palazzo Branciforte di Mazzarino, which in 1684 also hosted other precious textile artefacts embellished with corals such as "an embroidered *segesta* with 46 pieces of braid embroidered with coral and silver, three adornments embroidered with coral and silver". This could be a helpful piece of information for our flounce, which must originally have served as an ornament for a textile meant for interior decoration or to embellish an altar frontal.

In the most sophisticated and valuable pieces, paraments and borders were mainly embroidered with coral beads.

Palermo had several embroidery workshops that could execute embroideries both for religious patrons, such as the workshop of the Barone family, and for secular clients, like the Bruno workshop specializing in embroidery for garments and that of Girolamo Mancarelli

¹ L. Chifari, C. D'Arpa, *Vivere e abitare da nobili a Palermo tra Seicento e Ottocento gli inventari ereditari dei Branciforti principi di Scordia*, Palermo 2019, pp. 129 - 134.





1. G.Rassanelli, detail of the antependium for the Chapel of the Crucifix in Palermo Cathedral

which, in the early decades of the 18th century, preferentially received commissions to furnish the rooms of the city's residences. Another workshop was that of Giovanni Rassanelli called il Fiorentino; Giovanni Travagliato has uncovered the document confirming the attribution to him of the altar frontal for the Chapel of the Crucifix in Palermo cathedral². This is a work in cloth embroidered with gold and silver thread to form plant motifs, raised thanks to the expedient of stuffing them with cotton wool, fabric and hemp thread, with the application of red coral beads. The studies of Maria Concetta Di Natale have compared this work to the Baroque hangings and baldachins decorated with applications of coral and made during the second half of the 17th century; an example is the strip in a private collection in Catania (Fig. 2) or

² Evira D'Amico Del Rosso, *Appunti per una storia del ricamo palermitano in età barocca. La committenza nobiliare*, in *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, catalogue of the exhibition ed. by Maria Concetta Di Natale, Milan, Edizioni Charta 2001, pp. 204-221. The altar frontal published by M. VITELLA, *I manufatti tessili della Cattedrale di Palermo*, in Maria Concetta Di Natale – Maurizio Vitella, *Il Tesoro della Cattedrale di Palermo*, Palermo 2010, pp. 118-119 has been attributed to Rassanelli by Giovanni Travagliato, *Due paliotti ricamati da Giovanni Rassanelli alias Fiorentino per la Cappella del Crocifisso nella Cattedrale di Palermo*, in OADI, no. 5, June 2012, pp. 79-87. In the document reported by the scholar, it is said that the embroiderer Giovanni Rassanelli called Fiorentino confirmed the receipt of the balance of the sum due for the execution of two altar frontals for the Chapel of the Santissimo Crocifisso inside the cathedral from those responsible for the chapel.







2. Headband embroidered with corals, Catania, private collection



3. Embroidered headbands, Milan and Lugano, private collections

the flounces in private collections in Milan and Lugano (Fig. 3) but plausibly originally in the princely residences of the Branciforte family, princes of Trabia, of the Butera family and of the prince of Avellino Francesco Marino II Caracciolo, later adapted and given to the Holy House of Loreto in 1722¹.

Our flounce was similar to these, embroidered on a velvet backing with a technique that involved creating strongly projecting embroidery, typical of the embroiderers active in Sicily during the second half of the 17th century and in particular of the aforementioned altar frontal embroidered by Rassanelli towards the end of the 17th century.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ Maria Concetta Di Natale, *I coralli della Santa Casa di Loreto*, in Maria Concetta Di Natale, Guido Cornini e Umberto Utro, eds, *Sicilia Ritrovata. Arti decorative dai Musei Vaticani e dalla Santa Casa di Loreto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Monreale 2012, pp. 121-122, pp. 119 – 122.

13.

Paolo Porpora

(*Naples 1617 – Rome 1673*)

POMEGRANATES, GRAPES, FIGS AND MUSHROOMS IN A BASKET, IN A BOX AND ON THE GROUND, BRANCH OF TUBEROSES IN A GLASS VASE

Oil on canvas, 90 x 126 cm, 115 x 150 cm with frame

The splendid painting presented here has been known to me since it appeared at the Colasanti-Moore auction held at Sotheby's in Milan in February 2000, with an attribution to Giovan Battista Ruoppolo¹. Auctioned in the subsequent lot was another still life of slightly different dimensions (92.5 x 132.5 cm) ascribed to the same Neapolitan master and depicting *Grapes, cherries, peaches, melons, plums, pomegranates, roses and artichokes*.

The high quality of both compositions justified their prestigious attributions to an artist such as Giovan Battista Ruoppolo but the information provided by the auction house reflected the period's scarce knowledge of the principal still life painters active in Rome and Naples during the 17th century. Later studies have shown that the paintings were in fact executed by different painters.

I published the second painting in 2005 in a monographic essay that aimed to introduce the previously unknown artist Carlo Manieri, originally from Taranto but who spent almost his entire career in Rome².

I again saw the first painting, that presented here, in 2006 at the house of its purchaser when I was asked by the latter to provide a more appropriate attribution following an in-depth study of the work. On this occasion I identified it as a certain work of the Neapolitan Paolo Porpora, executed during his Roman period, from the 1640s until his death.

There is documentary evidence that Paolo Porpora began his apprenticeship with Giacomo Recco in February 1632³; in his workshop he was able to apply himself to the principal genres of Neapolitan still life (flowers, fruit, seafood). The period during which he worked exclusively in his hometown was fairly brief, and by 1648 he was already listed in the parish

¹ *Sotheby's*, Milan, 29 February-1 March 2000, lot 804.

² Gianluca Bocchi-Ulisse Bocchi, *Pittori di natura morta a Roma. Artisti italiani 1630-1750*, Viadana 2005, p. 543, Fig. CM.15.

³ Ulisse Prota Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del '500*, Naples 1953, p. 16.







1. Paolo Porpora, *Apples, grapes, asparagus and a vase of flowers en plein air*, Rome, Finarte

registers of San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome, where he was living as a boarder at an inn in Via del Corso together with Viviano Codazzi⁴.

According to the 17th-century Neapolitan biographer Bernardo De Dominici, Paolo Porpora was a skilled and multi-talented painter, who “applied himself to painting various sorts of animals, executed fish and various fruits excellently, with other sea creatures, and also painted fruit, citrus, poultry, birds and other edible things”.

Paolo Porpora came to full maturity as a painter in Rome, though throughout his life he kept up constant financial and property relations with Naples and its local patrons. In the papal city he became the true antagonist of Mario Nuzzi in the genre of Baroque flower painting, as attested by the patronage of the princes Chigi, Albani and Ludovisi and the nickname by which he was known, Paoluccio delli fiori (“Paolo of the flowers”), modelled after that of Mario dei fiori.

⁴ Loredana Lorizzo, *Nuovi documenti su Francesco Graziani detto Ciccio Napoletano e su Paolo Porpora a Roma con qualche osservazione sulle dinamiche del commercio dei dipinti nel Seicento*, in “Ricerche sul Seicento napoletano. Saggi in memoria di Oreste Ferrari 2007”, pp. 59-59; Federico Trastulli, *Paolo Porpora a Roma. Registro dei documenti, novità e qualche considerazione*, in “Ricerche sul Seicento napoletano. Saggi in memoria di Oreste Ferrari 2007”, p. 133.



2. Paolo Porpora, *Flowers, fruits and a bas-relief in a landscape*, Turin, Vittorio Di Capua collection

Evidence of his artistic calibre, considered equal to that of Nuzzi, is that both were among the very few still life painters admitted to the Accademia di San Luca. It is also worth noting that both were commissioned, probably by King Philip IV of Spain, to execute the four flower garlands documented at the Escorial from 1667, two of which I have identified as being by Porpora and two by Nuzzi⁵.

His versatile talents enabled him to imitate elegant silver and glass artefacts very effectively. We can admire these depicted in some of his paintings together with fruit and flowers, alongside sophisticated canvases containing mushrooms, frogs, tortoises, reptiles, butterflies, snails, grasshoppers, beetles and various insects animating the animal and plant life of undergrowth and little ponds.

The latter are illustrative models derived from northern European painters of the calibre of Otto Marseus and Matthias Withoos, both of whom were in Rome in the very early 1650s. However, while in Dutch art symbolic and moralizing allusions to the transience and brevity of

⁵ Bocchi-Bocchi, *Pittori di natura morta a Roma. Artisti italiani 1630-1750*, Viadana 2005, pp. 92-95, Figs MN.32-35.





3. Paolo Porpora, *Flowers, fruits, mushrooms, a fountain and a bird in a landscape*, Turin, Vittorio Di Capua collection

life were central, with insects and other animals as menacing agents of aggression against the flourishing vegetation, in Porpora's undergrowth a colourful and lively descriptive vein prevails, replete with an intensely Neapolitan naturalism.

Examining this painting, we see the same analytical attention to detail applied to a classic posed still life in which the mushrooms are no longer in the forest but picked and placed on the ground. Likewise, the figs, grapes and pomegranates have been stripped from trees and vines to be placed in a basket, box, or on the ground. The whole is softened by a climbing branch of tuberose placed in a transparent glass vase half full of water.

Porpora always uses this vital liquid to characterize his still lives, both when he shows it in a vessel and when he allows it to flow in a stream or pond, and again when he has it gleam in minute drops on fruit and leaves, giving it all his typical dots of highlight that are clearly visible here.

This important painting was likely executed in an initial period in Rome, plausibly in the 1650s when the floral element was still a minor aspect of his work, as in the canvas that appeared on the market in 2022, still a work in clearly Neapolitan style (Fig. 1)⁶.

⁶ Finarte, Rome, 31 May 2022, lot 166.

The paintings of the following years see a progressive increase in the botanical component as a consequence of the competition with Mario Nuzzi. This is apparent in the pair of large canvases formerly in the Di Capua collection in Turin, in one of which the same basket full of figs appears in the top background as in our painting, accompanied by bunches of grapes and bursting pomegranates (Fig. 2).

Less obvious are the formal parallels with the second canvas, where the fruit component is limited to the lower right quadrant, though the choice of mushrooms placed prevalently with the cap downwards represents a highly characteristic constant (Fig. 3).

The peculiar similarity to our painting can also be seen in the animal presence, limited in one canvas to a butterfly fluttering at the lower right and in the other to some birds, one standing on the edge of a fountain and other smaller ones in a group, again at the lower right. An isolated starling appears on the left-hand side of our composition, gazing at the overflowing abundance of fruit.

The Baroque exuberance attained in open-air compositions like the Di Capua canvases and the pair in the Musée des Baux-Arts in Valence has not yet touched the fine painting presented here, more reminiscent of a late Caravaggism with Neapolitan undertones, expressed in both the dark background and in the accentuated lighting that Paolo Porpora never forgets, even in his most mature works.

Its excellent state of conservation makes our painting a highly significant work in the artistic career of the Neapolitan Paolo Porpora.

GIANLUCA BOCCHI

14.

Trapani, end of the 17th century

PAIR OF CANDLESTICKS

Jasper, coral, gilded copper, 49 cm

The individual jasper elements include the three-sided base with beveled edges, in a wavy bell shape; followed by a six-sided vase element, a disk, a long baluster made up of two pieces and an octangular plate below the iron tip. The individual parts of hard stone are connected by metal bands, with single or double coral inserts. The curled feet connected to each other by gilded copper festoons are made using the same technique.

The precious variety of jasper (*diaspro agatato*) with gray and brown tones is of Sicilian origin¹, confirming the manufacture of these two candlesticks in the region which invented the typical coral inlay on copper which can be seen well applied here, both for decorative and functional purposes given that the various metal rings serve to cover the joint of the individually carved stone parts.

In the same rare stone is a vase of probable French workmanship and mounting from the 15th century, part of the Treasury of Lorenzo de' Medici, whose initials it bears (Florence, Museo degli Argenti)².

The use of jasper paired with coral to form the works here presented is however unusual and makes the specimens particularly precious. The only other hard stone that was combined with the works of the Trapani coral workers seems to have been rock crystal: several Sicilian liturgical objects are known in which coral and crystal come together, as in the large crucifix of the Church of Gesù at Casa Professa (Palermo)³. There is also documentary evidence of no longer existing or unidentified works of this kind: among the assets listed in the inventory drawn up upon the death of the Duke of Bracciano, Flavio Orsini, in 1696 there are listed "two crystal lustres garnished with corals" (*due lustriere di cristallo guarnite di coralli*)⁴.

Two different types of workers were involved in the construction of our candlesticks: goldsmiths specialized in cutting and fitting coral onto copper together with an expert stone-

¹ Giuseppe Montana, Valentina Gagliardo Briuccia, *I marmi e i diaspri del barocco siciliano*, Palermo, 1998, figg. 141, 159.

² *Il Tesoro di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, a cura di Detlef Heikamp, II, I vasi, Firenze 1972, cat. 61.

³ *Coralli talismani sacri e profani*, catalogo della mostra *L'arte del corallo in Sicilia* a cura di M.C. Di Natale, Palermo, 1996, cat 73

⁴ Archivio di Stato di Roma, 30 notai capitolini, S. De Comitibus, off. 29, vol 281.





Vase, probably France, 15th Century, Florence, Museo degli Argenti

cutter who tackled the particularly hard stone.

One of the few known names of this type of craftsmen in the late 17th century Sicily is that of a certain Gian Giorgio identified as a German goldsmith active in Palermo (Giovanni Giorgio Stella), author of the hard and soft stone inlays inserted on the silver and coral cabinets commissioned by the Viceroy of Sicily Claude Lamoral I, Prince de Ligne in 1670-1672⁵.

The shape of our examples is similar to that of other Sicilian candlesticks in coral and copper dating back to the mid-seventeenth century such as those in a little-known altar set in the cathedral of Genzano (Rome) where it arrived in 1664 as a gift from Cardinal Girolamo Colonna (1604- 1666)⁶.

ROBERTO VALERIANI

⁵ Francesco Gabriele Polizzi, in *Artificia Siciliae. Arti decorative siciliane nel collezionismo europeo*, a cura di Maria Concetta Di Natale, Palermo, 2016, pp. 165-195.

⁶ Giuliana Zandri in *Tesori d'Arte Sacra di Roma e del Lazio dal medioevo all'Ottocento*, cat. della mostra, Roma 1975, cat. 283.







15.

Trapani, late 17th – early 18th century

CRUCIFIX

Coral, gilt copper, silver, 34 x 18 x 13 cm

The hexagonal base narrows towards the top and the three front-facing sections are completely covered in plant motifs carved in coral, arranged in four horizontal registers with a large flower at the centre of the widest. Above is an undulating support, also densely decorated in coral with a little theatrical mask within a silver wreath at the centre surmounted by a flower. On this support stands the metal cross with embossed and chased tendrils; the ends of the arms are in the form of cherubim and rays depart from their crossing. Contrasting with the metal structure is the coral Christ, with hands and feet resting on silver plaques. The same precious material is used for the female figure kneeling at the foot of the cross and the two angels with silver wings at her sides.

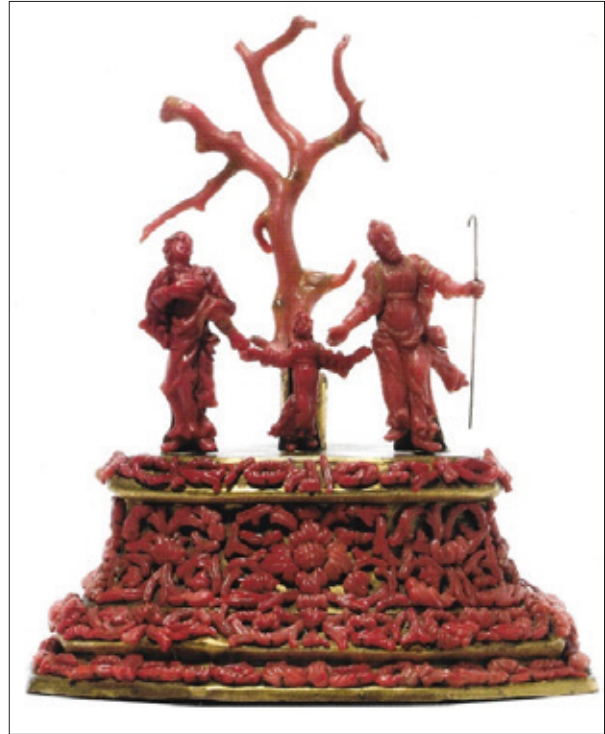
Coral and amber fishing off the coasts of Sicily, and elsewhere, with Trapani as its base, brings in an astonishing quantity of these products of nature, large amounts of which are consumed here for feminine ornaments, snuff boxes, monstres, nativity scenes, etc wrote Count Michel-Jean de Borch in his *Lettres sur la Sicilie* ... printed in Turin in 1782. The fame enjoyed over the centuries by Trapani's skilled artisans is attested not only by the writings of erudite travellers like de Borch but above all by the presence of coral artefacts in the major princely collections of all of Europe. This presence is confirmed both by the extant objects and by documents and old inventories. Making such objects required the collaboration of a silversmith, responsible for the metal parts and any enamel ornaments, and a sculptor or more accurately a gem cutter, expert in cutting stones, ivory and coral. As de Borch noted, an extremely wide variety of items were made using this technique, comprising practical objects like ink wells, salt cellars, implements for personal grooming, scent bottles and plates, but above all religious artefacts in the form of liturgical objects or works for domestic devotion like our elegant group.

Our piece is exceptional in its complex interpretation of the crucifixion of Christ. As in a religious drama, figures are depicted at the foot of the cross: the kneeling Mary (or perhaps another of the holy women present at Christ's death) and two angels, giving it a well-calibrated liveliness. This typical compositional richness, as mentioned, owes a great deal to the apparatus of contemporary Sicilian festivals, triumphs, mystery plays, processions and Quarantore – all the ephemera prepared for sacred and secular celebrations. Reduced in scale and adapted to domestic proportions it still maintains the scintillating wealth of ornament characteristic of Sicilian taste at the time. The theatrical spirit of these sacred dramas in coral has





Trapani, late 17th - early 18th century, *Holy Family*, Christie's London, 5 July 2007, lot. 80



distant origins, at the heart of which lies a lost work of which we nonetheless have a lengthy and detailed description. This is the so-called “Coral Mountain” presented in 1570 to Philip II Habsburg by the Viceroy of Sicily, Don Ferdinando d’Avalos, made up of over eighty coral figures representing scenes from the life of Christ and of various saints.¹

As in ephemeral works of architecture, our group and other similar sacred images in coral and gilt bronze rest on architectural bases that give a theatrical emphasis to their composition. Supports similar to that of our work can be found in other contemporary pieces; we could mention that holding a statuette of the Virgin Immaculate² and especially that of a group with the Holy Family, reproduced below, particularly similar to ours in its subdivision into four horizontal registers with a large flower at the centre of the widest.³

ROBERTO VALERIANI

¹ Anna Barricelli, “una ‘Montagna di Corallo’ e la scultura di Andrea Tipa”, in *Le arti in Sicilia nel Settecento. Studi in Memoria di Maria Accascina*, Palermo, 1985, pp. 237-250.

² *Coralli, talismani sacri e profani*, catalogue of the exhibition ed. by Vincenzo Abbate and Maria Concetta Di Natale, Trapani, Museo Regionale Pepoli, 1986, cat. no. 106.

³ Formerly Christie's, London, 5 July 2007, lot 80.





16.

Trapani, 17th/18th century

INKWELL

Gilt brass and coral, 36 x 33 cm

Three bulbous recipients, supported by sirens with forked tails, rest on a mixtilinear base at whose centre stands a tall feature with concave faces topped by a female figure carved in the round. The work presents an unusually rich decoration of comma motifs, mother of pearl and coral flowers, silver bands around the edges of the surfaces and tiny floral festoons hanging from the two registers of the central structure. The design of these recipients is identical to that of two inkwells in the Museo Nazionale di San Martino in Naples, where we also see the same sirens, alluding to the emblem of Sicily. This complex and rare work echoes the style of the temporary decorations and triumphs typical of Sicilian Baroque festivals: it is no coincidence that a work in copper and coral with a central feature fairly similar to ours, the so-called Triumph of Charles II, has been ascribed to the compositional style of the architect Giacomo Amato ¹.

ROBERTO VALERIANI

¹ Vincenzo Abate, ed. *Wunderkammer siciliana alle origini del museo perduto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2000, pp. 124-125.







17.

Trapani, late 17th–early 18th century

FRAME

Gilt bronze, corals and enamel, 50 x 35 cm

The shape of this precious frame in gilt metal and corals represents a further development of the elaborate frames of the devotional plaques made in Trapani during the 17th century, of which the piece discussed here with the *Assumption of the Virgin* at its centre (Fig. 1), represents a sophisticated example. The motif with coral cabochons arranged symmetrically using the *retroincastrato* technique in the internal concave moulding and along the external edge, bordered with a sort of filigree with open-work cusps, is typical of the frames executed in Trapani for sacred images to be hung next to beds. Specifically, we could mention the luxurious devotional plaque with the *Virgin Immaculate* in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia at Palazzo Abatellis, executed during the first half of the 17th century, and the pieces formerly in the Whitaker collection and the collection of the Banca Popolare di Novara¹.

Unlike these prototypes, which make ample use of coloured enamels, the decoration of our frame is focused wholly on the visually appealing contrast between the gold of the metal support and the intense red of the corals, with enamel relegated exclusively to the corner palmettes. Both the frame discussed here and the aforementioned devotional plaques share the practice of decorating the whole of the back with an extensive decorative motif of intertwined volutes engraved directly onto the sheet of gilt copper, thus making these objects a precious whole. The broad rectangular shape, unusual in 17th-century devotional plaques, and the sobriety of the ornaments suggest that this unusual mirror frame should be dated to between the late 17th and early 18th century.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ In this context see the pieces discussed by various authors in the catalogue of the exhibition ed. by Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti Decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, Palermo 2000, pp. 475 – 488 and in that ed. by Valeria Patrizia Li Vigni, Maria Concetta Di Natale, Vincenzo Abbate, *I grandi capolavori del corallo. I coralli di Trapani del XVII e XVIII secolo*, Trapani, 2013, pp. 78 – 95.





Trapani, late 17th – early 18th century, Devotional plaque in gilt copper, enamel and coral with the Assumption of Mary, 28 x 23 cm



PAIR OF CHANDELIERS

Silver filigree and Simento amber, 20 x 13.5 cm

This pair of chandeliers, made of silver filigree, belongs to a whole series of objects executed in this peculiar artistic technique, developed in Sicily from the 17th century. It involved the reproduction in miniature of furniture and objects originally made of wood or metal using fine silver threads. The production of such works, intended as ornaments or more generally as collector's items, pursued a specific ideal of resemblance to the prototypes used in each case as models. As can be deduced from the archive documents, these artefacts were commissioned by the most prominent members of the Sicilian aristocracy. In the inventory of Duke Giovanni Angelo Maddaloni, drawn up in 1725, we find a description of a "scarabbatto", or small vitrine, inside which were "many little silver knick-knacks" including "a silver fountain, another in filigree, a little scent bottle and many other little items in silver and coral" used as playthings by the Duke's children. In another inventory, compiled by the notary Baldassare Fontane in 1741, descriptions of various miniature silver items are provided, such as "little bunches of flowers", "small baskets" or "little sideboards". These were thus objects in which the virtuoso technical skills required to work filigree aroused the interest of a type of connoisseurship that owed a great deal to the spirit of 16th and 17th century *wunderkammern*, collecting a variety of objects that had in common their bizarre forms. In other cases, works like the chandeliers under discussion here could be placed inside caskets, in which the cabinetmakers often recreated the rooms of aristocratic Baroque residences on a smaller scale¹.

Works in filigree were executed principally in Sicily, particularly in Palermo, Trapani and Messina, starting from the 17th century and throughout the following century, reaching a wide circulation in the years between the two. We can date the execution of our two chandeliers to this period, and specifically to the early years of the 18th century. Stylistically, they resemble the two similar pairs now in Palermo in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia (Figs 1 - 2) which replicate the form of the monumental late Baroque chandeliers in carved and gilt wood. As concerns the pieces examined here, the light and sophisticated touch with which the various

¹ The art of filigree has been studied by Maria Concetta di Natale, *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti Decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2001, pp. 433 – 434 and by Santina Grasso, *Le filigrane*, in Vincenzo Abbate, ed., *Wunderkammern siciliana alle origini del museo perduto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2001, pp. 263 – 271.







1. *Pair of six-arm chandeliers*, Sicily, late 17th century – 1st half of the 18th century, Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia



2. *Pair of six-arm chandeliers*, Sicily, late 17th century – 1st half of the 18th century, Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia

component parts were executed is indicative of the talents of a skilled artisan, able to work filigree in line with the nascent rococo style. This is apparent in the decoration of the small candle holders and in the pendants holding the beads of the unusual Sicilian amber known as Simento amber as it was found in the river running through the plain of Catania.

ENRICO COLLE





DEVOTIONAL PLAQUE

Embossed and chased gilt copper, coral, mother of pearl, Sicilian jasper and glass paste
56.5 x 43.5 x 8.5 (frame); 13 x 6.5 x 4 (sculpture)

This sumptuous frame, enclosing an ivory sculpture of the *Virgin and Child*, presents a decoration of acanthus leaf scrolls and flowers executed in a variety of precious materials: embossed and chased gilt copper, mother of pearl, coral and jasper. This complex ornament is typical of the skilled artisans from Trapani active in the early 18th century. It also appears on other similar frames in the municipal collections of Turin, in the Museo del Duca di Martina in Naples and in a private collection in Palermo (Figs 1-3), to mention just the most striking examples in line with the late Baroque style of our work¹.

The crinkled acanthus leaves artfully arranged inside the frame call to mind the “scroll-work” present on some Sicilian furniture of the same period, like the credenza and console tables in various Sicilian churches and, at the same time, the elaborate ornaments designed by Giacomo Amato². Specifically, we could mention the ornamentalist’s designs for frames (Fig. 4), of which one dated 1698 presents analogies with the complex arrangement of intertwined mother of pearl acanthus leaves decorating the whole frame of this devotional plaque, whose exuberant forms clearly signal its belonging to the Trapanese production of the early 18th century. This is a luxurious genre of works in which – as Maria Concetta Di Natale stresses³ – the use of precious and semi-precious raw materials was intended both to form an impressive display of riches and to create an effect of exuberant polychromy.

ENRICO COLLE

¹ Enrico Colle, *Il mobile Barocco in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1600 al 1738*, Milan 2000, pp. 50 – 53.

² Colle, op. cit. 2000, pp. 42 – 43.

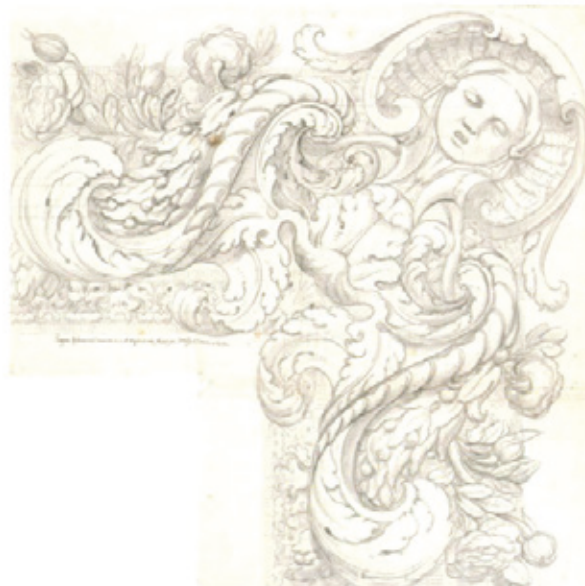
³ Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare*, Palermo 2003, pp. 269 – 270.







1. Trapani workshop, *Devotional Plaque*, Turin, Museo Civico
2. Trapani workshop, *Frame*, Naples, Museo Duca di Martina
3. Trapani workshop, *Devotional Plaque*, Palermo, private collection



4. Giacomo Amato, *Designs for frames*, 1698, Palermo, Palazzo Abatellis

PAIR OF BUREAU-CABINETS

Wood veneered with carob and rosewood, inlaid with mother of pearl, ivory and maple, gilt bronze applications, 256 x 95.5 x 54 cm

Both pieces of furniture, veneered with exotic woods and inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl, are decorated with panels depicting episodes drawn from the book of Genesis. On the drop front of the first cabinet is the scene of *The Rape of Dinah* with at the centre the following Latin inscription: "SIMEON . ET LEVI FRATRES . DINAE . GLADIIS . URBEM INGRESSI . HEMO . ET . SICHEM . OMNIBUSQUE . MAS- CULIS . INTERFECTIS . TOLUNT . SOROREM . SUAM . DE . DOMO SICHEM GEN 34" ("Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and entered the city. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem and all the men. Then they took their sister from Shechem's house", Genesis 34); the stories of Joseph are illustrated on the fronts of the drawers beneath, from top to bottom.

The drop front of the second cabinet presents a depiction of *Jacob Blessing Joseph's Two Sons* with at the centre the Latin inscription "IACOB . PROGREDIENS . ADORAVIT . SEPTIES VENIENTEM . AD SE . ESAU QUI . CURREB . OBRIAM . FRATRI . ANPILATUS . EST . EUM IACOBIT MORTI . PROXIMUS DUOS FILIOS ISOPH . IN SUOS . ECIPIT ET COMMUTATIS . MANIBUS CONSTITUIT EPHRAIM MINOREM . A TE . MANASSEN . GEN . 48" ("Jacob advanced and bowed down seven times towards Esau, who was coming to meet him. The latter ran to his brother and embraced him. Jacob, close to death, welcomed Joseph's two sons among his own and, crossing over his hands, chose Ephraim, who was younger than Manasseh", Genesis 48). Episodes from the life of Joseph are also shown on the drawers of this second piece.

Both bureau-cabinets have a slender architectural structure ending in an undulating cresting with an inlay at its centre depicting a crowned eagle, in turn surmounted by a frieze with gilt bronze volutes flanked by four little vases also in chased gilt bronze. The sides and the front containing the drawers with handles in the shape of gilt bronze theatre masks have an undulating form and their veneered surfaces are embellished with inlaid volutes and floral motifs. Opening the drop front, we see that the desk compartment of each piece has several drawers at the back arranged in steps; at the centre is a door holding a mirror engraved with allegorical figures: Justice in the first cabinet and Temperance in the second. At the sides of this little door are two small drawers in turn flanked by pigeonholes. The upper part consists of a door with a mirror opening onto an internal space.





Fig. 1. G. Clavella, *Pair of bureau-cabinets*, private collection

The form and dimensions of the two bureau-cabinets, whose curving surfaces are completely decorated with ivory inlays on biblical subjects, is modelled on those of a pair of chests of drawers with a drop front (Fig. 1). The latter present variants in the cresting, which has a little vase at the centre in place of the frieze adorning our pieces, and in the subjects inlaid on the drop front, drawn from Genesis books 28 (*Jacob Visits His Father Isaac to Obtain the Blessing of the First-Born Before His Mother Rebecca* and *Jacob's Dream*) and 31 (*Jacob's Journey to Canaan*) while other episodes from the Old Testament have been selected for the drawers¹.

These pieces of furniture present subjects and decorations very similar to those inlaid on a bureau-cabinet (Fig. 2) executed using the same technique in around 1725 by the cabinetmaker from Palermo Giovanni Clavella, who signed himself “Ioannes Lavella Alias Garofaro Fecit” on the inside of one of the doors. Like our cabinets, this singular piece of furniture – published by Alvar Gonzàlez-Palacios² – was conceived to be adorned with inlays on subjects drawn from

¹ Enrico Colle, *Intaglio e arredo ligneo in Sicilia tra Rinascimento e tardobarocco*, In *Manufacere et scolpire in lignamine. Scultura e intaglio in legno in Sicilia tra Rinascimento e Barocco*, Palermo 2012, pp. 642 – 643, Fig. 12.

² Sotheby's auction, Milan, December 1994, pp. 92 – 95, lot no. 1198.





Fig. 2. G. Clavella, *Bureau-cabinet*, private collection

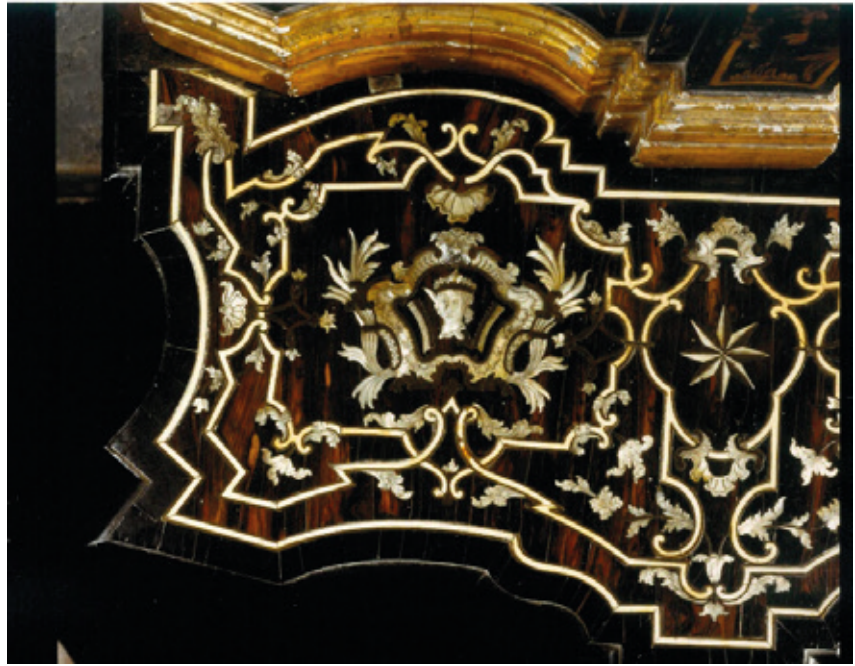


Fig. 3. *Detail of the inlays on the pews of the Oratory of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria all'Olivella*



the stories of Genesis and in particular from books 24, 27 and 46, which also cover the events connected to the life of Jacob. This is also the iconographical theme of our two bureau-cabinets, suggesting that they were designed for patrons who had a common interest in studying the texts of the Old Testament

As previously proposed by González-Palacios³, the style of these furnishings can be confidently ascribed to Sicily, where Giovanni Clavella, also called “Garofaro”, created sumptuous furnishings for the oratories of Palermo. In this context we could mention, as examples of the technical skill of these inlayers, the fine decorations on the pews of the Oratory of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria all'Olivella (Fig. 3) executed by the end of 1726, or the inlays on the pews

³ Alvar González - Palacios *Nostalgia e invenzione*, Milan, 2010, pp. 52 -53, Plts XXII – XXIII.



Fig. 5. G. Porrizzo, *Detail of the inlays on the pews of the Oratory of the Santissimo Rosario in Santa Cita*

of the oratory of the Santissimo Rosario in Santa Cita (Fig. 4), made by Giuseppe Porrizzo between 1700 and 1702⁴.

These are thus the same years in which our inlayer was active; the elegant floral decoration of his furnishings seems to draw inspiration from the late Baroque taste for inlays in precious materials, much appreciated by Sicilian patrons whose refined tastes had crossed the boundaries of the region to arouse the admiration of foreign travellers.

ENRICO COLLE

⁴ Colle, *Il mobile barocco in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1600 al 1738*, Milan 2000, pp. 56 – 59.



PAIR OF COMMODES

Wood veneered in various types of rosewood, gilt copper applications and Sicilian jasper tops,
99 x 137 x 58.5 cm

This pair of commodes reflects the taste of the Sicilian aristocracy for furniture decorated with inlays and refined veneers, enriched by the application of ornaments in embossed and gilt metals following the dictates of the European fashion for rocaille, but interpreted in an entirely original way. As is apparent from the pieces currently known¹, Sicilian master craftsmen habitually covered the rounded surfaces of commodes, like those of bedside tables and bureaux, with veneers in exotic woods arranged to form geometrical patterns. As in our case, they were often embellished by the insertion of gilt metal ornaments².

The specialist in such metal ornaments was Michele Messina, paid in 1779 by the council of the Albergo dei Poveri, or Almshouse, in Palermo for executing the rail for the high altar of its adjoining church and “some items in gilt copper for the frontals of the lower altars”³. For the working of the valuable Sicilian marbles, we could mention Salvatore and Rocco Allegra, members of a family of marble workers active within the Jesuit Professed House, the church of the Santissimo Salvatore and that of Maria Santissima della Purificazione in the Almshouse of Palermo⁴.

From the archive documents, we also learn that two cabinetmakers were active in 1762 in Palermo, working at Palazzo Valguarnera Gangi. One, a certain Caetanus Passainnanti, was paid for making “a bureau in well-coloured terebinth wood inlaid with copper ornaments and frames at the edges in gilt copper in accordance with the design” ordered from him by the prince himself. The other, “Master Ignatius Pittoresci”, was commissioned to make the palace’s inlaid wooden floor. To the names of these artisans we should add that of Antonio Giunta, paid by the administration of the Gangi house for the execution of as many as four dressers veneered in “purple ebony edged in rosewood ... adorned with copper worked and gilt with pure gold

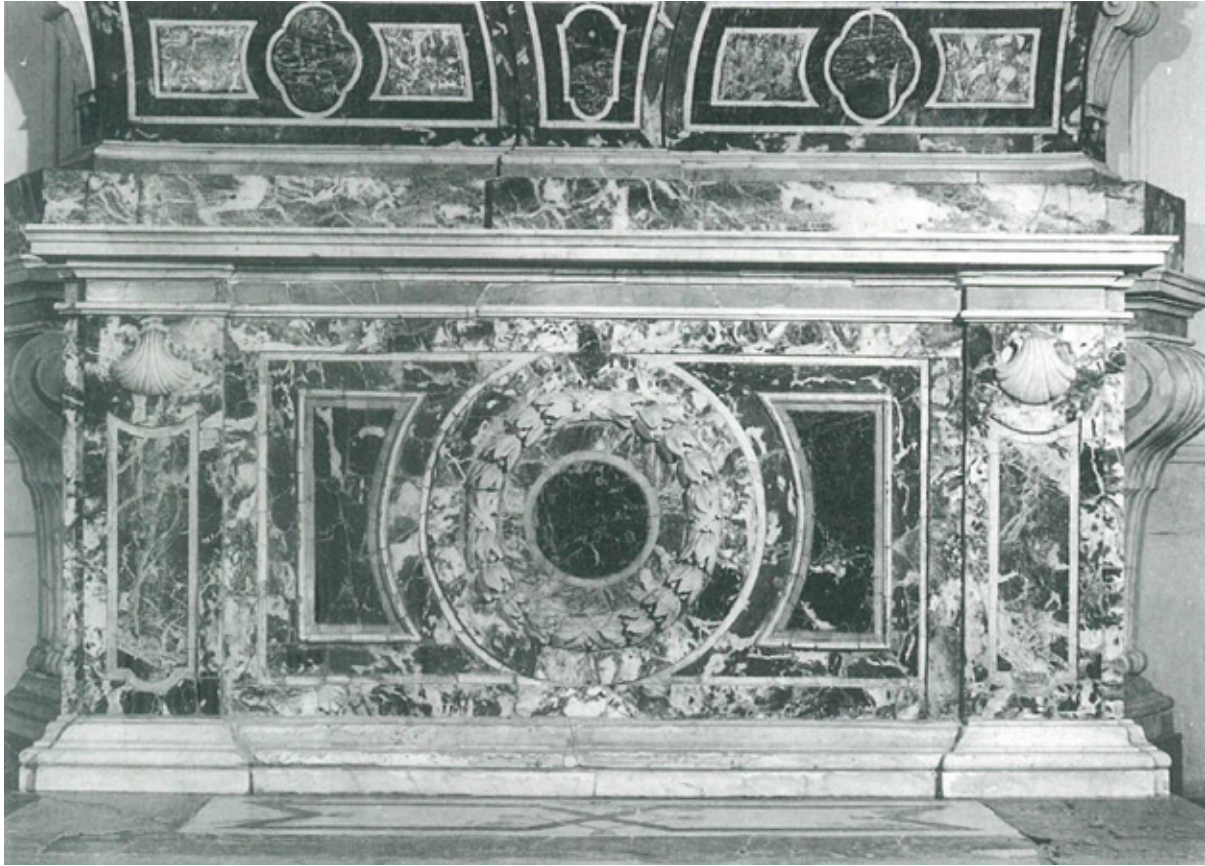
¹ Mario Giarrizzo, Aldo Rotolo, *Mobili e mobiliari nella Sicilia del Settecento*, Palermo 1992, pp. 73-76, 84-88.

² Enrico Colle, *Il mobile Rococò in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1738 al 1775*, Milan 2003, pp. 44 – 47.

³ Maurizio Vitella, *Il Real Albergo dei Poveri a Palermo*, Napoli 1999, p. 121, c. 88.

⁴ Vitella, *Il Real Albergo* cit. 1999, p. 74.





1. Salvatore and Rocco Allegra, *Altar in Sicilian marble with gilt bronze ornaments*, 1775 – 1777, Palermo, Albergo dei Poveri, church of Maria Santissima della Purificazione

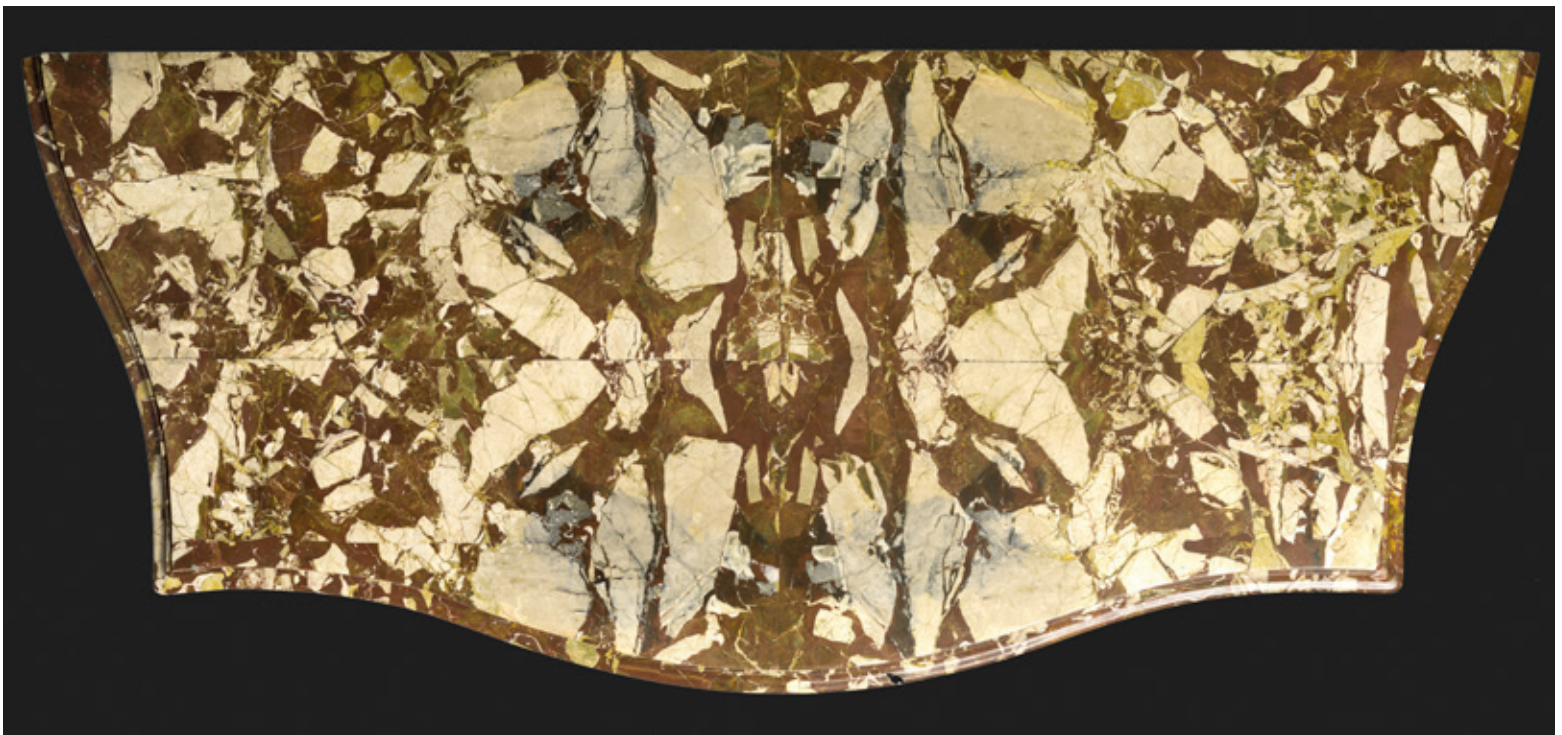
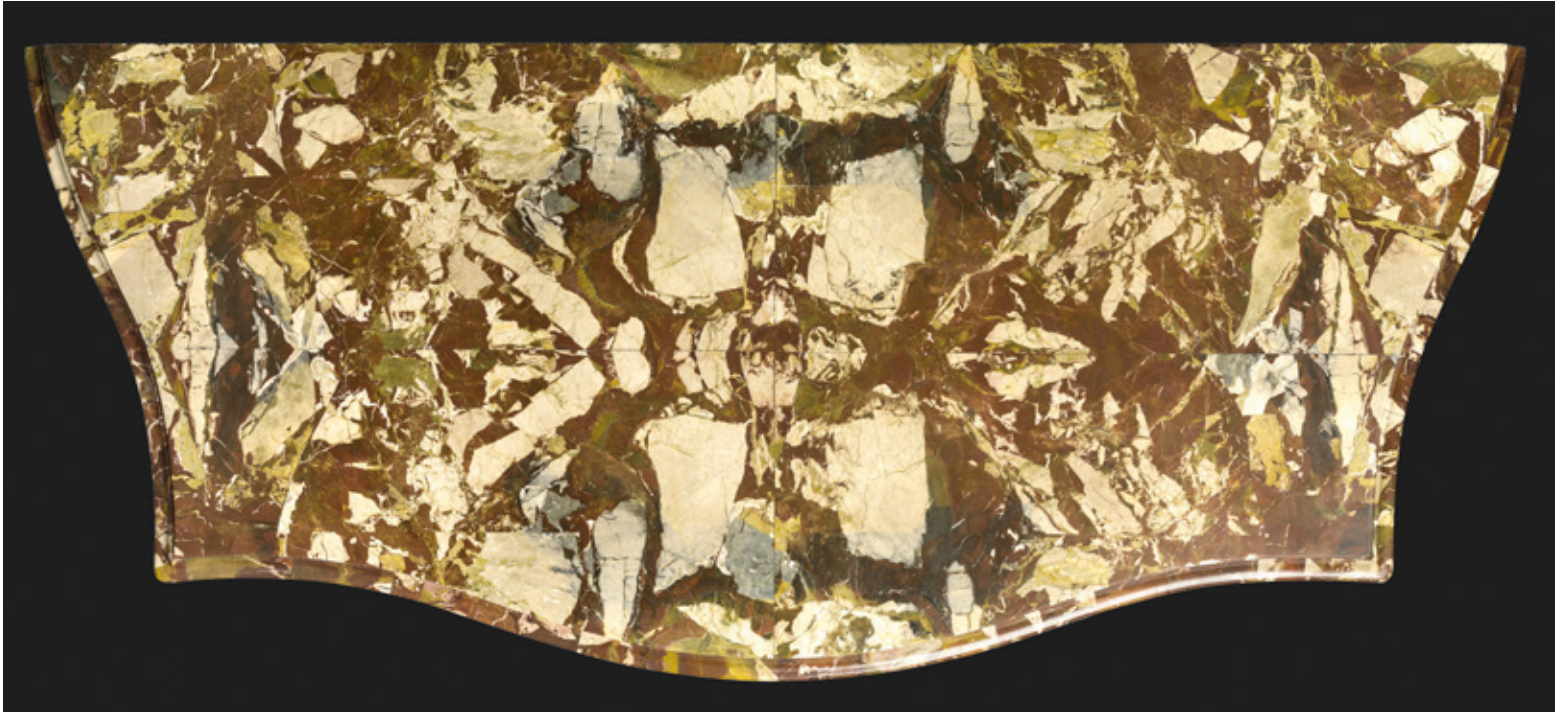
with copper piping between the drawers and with gilt copper finials on the feet and English-style locks, and with four tops of perfectly worked green stone”⁵.

It is thus likely that this pair of commodes, with their elegant geometrical marquetry further embellished by the precious inserts in gilt metal and by the jasper tops, was made by one of the aforementioned cabinetmaking workshops to furnish one of Palermo’s luxurious residences renovated in the middle years of the 18th century by architects working for princely patrons in Palermo. Examples are that of Giovan Battista Vaccarini (1702 - 1768), a student of Luigi Vanvitelli in Rome who renovated the palace of Don Domenico Alliata di Villafranca in Piazza Bologni in 1751 or that of Andrea Gigante (1731 - 1787), who worked for various members of the local aristocracy including Prince Francesco Saverio Valguarnera.

ENRICO COLLE

⁵ Erik Henry Neil, *Architecture in Context: the Villas of Bagheria. Sicily*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1995, pp. 281 and 284.







INKWELL

Naples, 18th century (1720 – 1740)

Tortoiseshell and gold piqué, 30 x 23 x 15 cm

This rare table inkwell resting on four feet is composed of a tray, two ink containers, a sander, a pen holder which constitutes the central body and a bell ¹. The tortoiseshell object was made in Naples at the beginning of the 18th century with a technique known as piqué, where the tortoiseshell is inlaid with gold.

The processing and use of tortoise shells for artistic purposes was already known in Roman times and was mentioned by writers such as Martial and Pliny who attributed it to a certain Carvilius Polion, an artist working in the 1st century BC, skilled in veneering furniture with this material.

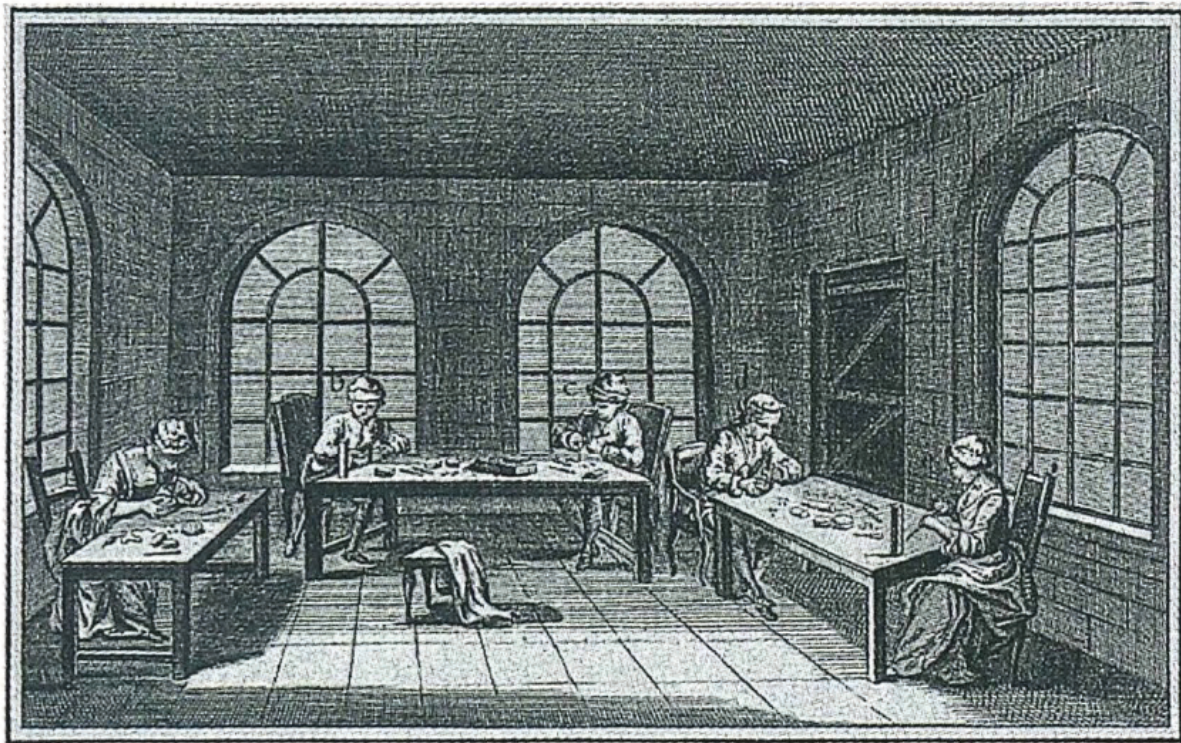
The processing of this material was partially forgotten during the Middle Ages, only to be rediscovered in the Renaissance starting from the end of the 16th century and reaching its peak in the 18th century. Although tortoiseshell processing was widespread throughout Europe in the eighteenth century (Fig. 1), the main production centre for such artefacts was Naples, reaching remarkable heights in terms of quality and technical expertise.

The processing of tortoise shells required several technical steps (Fig. 2) and numerous texts of the time illustrated the various phases and necessary precautions; first the shell was immersed in a cauldron in a solution of boiling water and oil where it was left to soak, then it was placed in a vice to give it the desired shape. This last step required considerable skill as it was necessary to ensure that the shell was not subjected to excessive pressure that might cause it to break and also not to let the shell cool down too much as this would render the operation pointless. Finally, the modeled shape was, through further steps, dried and polished and was finally inlaid in gold with various specific techniques.

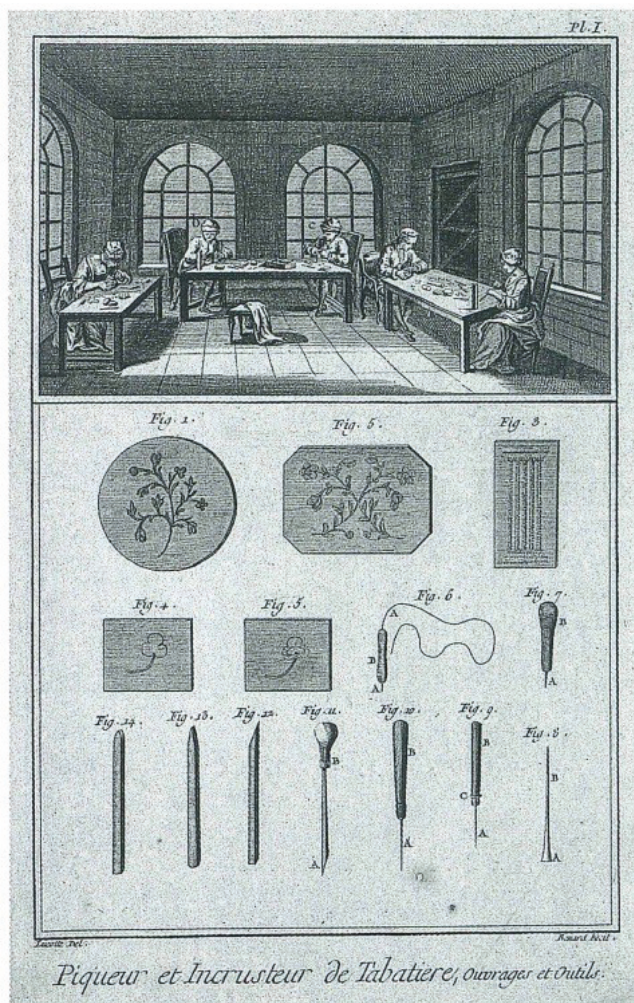
Tortoiseshell inkwells were highly sophisticated and fashionable objects in the eighteenth century and were frequently very welcome gifts for nobles and sovereigns both because these objects served a useful purpose and for the refinement of the various parts of which they were made up. This work can in fact be connected to the inkwell signed Sarao currently in the Wal-

¹ Luciana Arbace, *L'arte della tartaruga: le opere dei musei napoletani e la donazione Sbriziolo- De Felice*, Naples, F. Fiorentino, 1995. Alexis Kugel, *Complètement piqué. Le fol art de l'écaille à la cour de Naples*, Paris, Éditions Monelle Hayot, 2018.





1. Artisans working on a piquè object, Encyclopédie, Diderot e D'Alambert, Vol IV, Plt. I. detail



2. Working of piquè, Encyclopédie, Diderot e D'Alambert, Vol IV, pl I



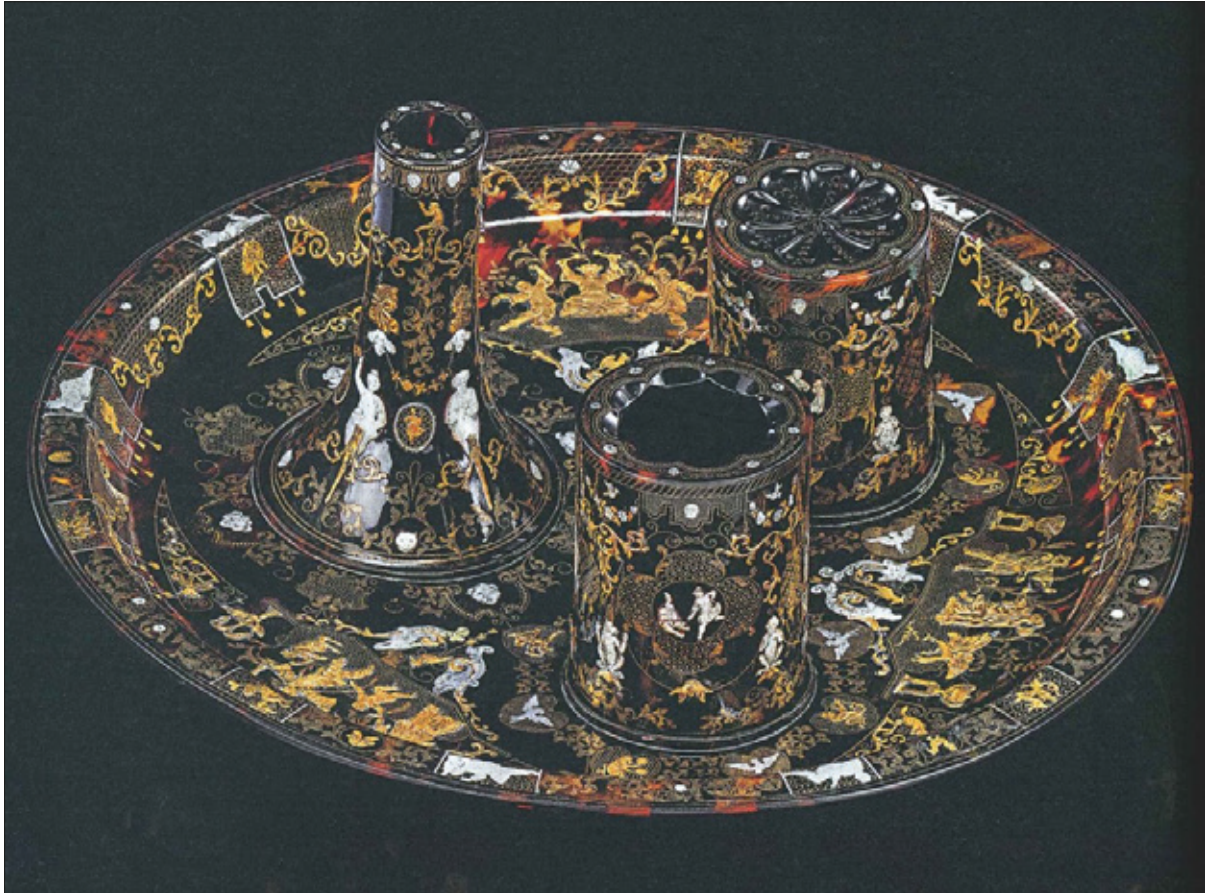




3. Inkwell in tortoiseshell and gold piqué, Sarao, Naples, 1735 - 1745 ca. Wallace Collection, London



4. Inkwell, Sarao (attr.), Italy, private collection



5. Inkwell, Sarao (attr.), Italy, private collection

lace Collection in London (Fig. 3): both are characterized by the presence of the dense and rich piqué gold decoration covering all the components, by the undulating shape of the tray and by the central presence of the pen holder.

The hand of the Sarao workshop can be seen in the precious and elegant piqué decoration consisting of floral racemes and bold spirals that run from the feet to the body of the containers, their caps and the tray, alternating with the classic stippling of the piqué gold which here also reaches the minute size of a few tenths of a millimeter.

Another inkwell, this time attributed to and not signed by the Saraos, which can be related to ours is that preserved in the Louvre in Paris (Fig. 4). This one is also inlaid with mother-of-pearl but has a less rich decoration than ours and that of the Wallace Collection.

Finally, a third inkwell (Fig. 5) by Sarao, which has three components instead of five, missing the bell and a container, is comparable to ours and is currently found in an important Italian private collection.

ROBERTO VALERIANI



23.

Trapani, mid-18th century

CRUCIFIX

Ivory, coral, mother of pearl, gilded silver and copper, jasper, ebony and rosewood, carved, painted and gilded wood, 94 x 43 x 18 cm

The ebony cross edged with rosewood is set on a base with festoons and gilded and painted scrolls; at the centre of the latter is a small plaque in red jasper. Another smaller plaque is at the feet of Christ, above a cameo in mother of pearl. The three ends of the cross are adorned with ivory cherubs surrounded by coral and mother of pearl ornaments; Christ and the titulus crucis, also in ivory, are separated by another small jasper plaque.

In this work we see a compendium of some of the distinctive materials in the use of which Sicily excelled between the 17th and 18th centuries, adopted in the radiant and luxurious manner that characterized the style of local artisans and ensured its renown. The ends of the cross present a distinctive ornamentation: cartouches with ivory cherubs accompanied by mother of pearl leaves on which rest little curlicues carved in coral. The technique and style are characteristic of a large number of known artefacts ranging from household furnishings, especially frames, to various types of devotional works¹. Equally typical are the plaques of Sicilian red jasper, an eminently local precious material, that in our work mirror the colouring of the coral². Also characteristic of the local decorative arts are the carvings in mother of pearl, often in the form of cameo medallions like that seen here, depicting Christ carrying the cross. Finally, the airy interlacing of scrolls on the base has parallels in Sicily both in wooden works and stone sculptures supported by bases composed of freely styled curled leaves³. Pieces with these features are usually attributed to master craftsmen from Trapani, but it is possible that other towns on the island, especially Palermo, also made their contribution. The long tradition of those workshops is expressed here not just in the ornamentation but also in the skillful depiction of Christ, carved in ivory and reminiscent of works attributable to the workshop of the Tipa,

¹ *Splendori di Sicilia*, exhibition catalogue ed. by Maria Concetta Di Natale, Palermo, 2001, pp. 123-129 with extensive preceding bibliography.

² Ibid., “*L’impiego dei diaspri e delle agate di Sicilia dal XVI al XVII secolo*” pp. 192-203 (Caterina Napoleone).

³ *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare*, exhibition catalogue ed. by Maria Concetta Di Natale, Trapani, 2003, pp. 225- 226 (St George and the Dragon, alabaster), p. 221 (St Francis de Paul, ivory) and passim.





a family of Trapani carvers well known from the sources and documented or certain works⁴. The figure represented here is that of the so-called Dead Christ, and resembles the prototype designed by Giovan Lorenzo Bernini for the crucifixes in the chapels of St Peter's in around 1658⁵. Particularly similar to this poignant figure of the Saviour in the abandonment of ath is the figure sculpted by Andrea Tipa as the focal point of an alabaster group with the Calvary⁶.

ROBERTO VALERIANI

⁴ Ibid., pp. 185-195.

⁵ Maurizio and Marcello Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Bernini*, Rome, 1967, p. 183.

⁶ *Materiali preziosi...*, cit., p. 185.

ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

Wood veneered in ebony and ivory, 30 x 42.5 x 17 cm

The ivory sculpture group representing the *Adoration of the Shepherds* stands on a wooden support consisting of two shelves veneered in ebony with ivory stringing, connected to one another by scrolls of acanthus leaves also carved in ivory. The composition unfolds from the central scene, with Mary, the baby Jesus and St Joseph beneath an ancient ruin, to cover the entire front surface of the three blocks of ivory. These are carved to form a mountain traversed by the shepherds with their gifts and on whose summit God the Father appears among clouds with a globe in his hand, surrounded by musical angels.

The work presents undeniable similarities to comparable works in ivory recently attributed to master craftsmen from Trapani¹ and in particular to the Tipa family. During the 18th century, these artisans attained an unprecedented skill in translating into materials such as ivory, mother of pearl, amber or alabaster (as an alternative to coral which was becoming increasingly rare) elaborate compositions with nativity scenes, the Ascension of Mary or the Last Judgement. They also executed figures of saints, like the Archangel Michael “driving out the demons” sculpted by Alberto Tipa and given in 1801 to Ferdinand IV, mentioned by the historian Giuseppe Maria Di Ferro because the artist “had spent more than seven years working this fine group in ivory”².

The Sicilian custom of celebrating Christmas with a nativity scene thus led the master craftsmen of Trapani to execute both individual shepherds and nativity compositions of various sizes, sometimes with inserts of coral or small papier-mâché sculptures. Generally, as in our case, these scenes consisted of a myriad of little shepherds, peasants, hunters and young women engaged in their daily tasks or walking towards the Holy Family placed at the centre in an architectural setting that imitated buildings of the Roman period, ruined to symbolize the advent of the new faith in a pagan world. Usually, the figure of the Eternal Father was placed at the top, seated upon a cloud with fluttering draperies and surrounded by angels in various

¹ On this see the entry on the Last Judgement in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia by Simonetta La Barbera, in Maria Concetta Di Natale, ed., *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare*, catalogue of the exhibition, Trapani 2003, pp. 241 - 243.

² Giuseppe Maria Di Ferro, *Guida per gli stranieri in Trapani*, Trapani 1825, p. 238.





1. Tipa Workshop, *Last Judgement*, Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia

poses: a complex arrangement that, as noted by Simonetta La Barbera³, recalls that adopted by Serpotta in his theatrical stucco work.

The elaborate ivory artefact depicting the *Last Judgement* within its sophisticated case of gilt copper and silver filigree in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia in Palermo (Fig. 1) has been attributed to the Tipa workshop. It shows stylistic analogies with the group of the *Fall of the Rebel Angels* on display in the Nelson-Atkins Museum (Fig. 2) in the varied poses of the numerous characters crowding the scene alongside technical similarities in the miniaturistic rendering of the figures. These same features can also be found in our *Adoration of the Shepherds*, in which the figures carved in ivory, traditional in Trapani, take on the theatrical attitudes derived from the contemporary late Baroque sculptures that inspired the Tipa family of sculptors and carvers from Trapani, active from the 18th century and part of the following century. They were famed for sculpting in ‘miniature in soft materials’ tiny works in various materials, but principally ivory, coral, amber, shell and alabaster.

The Tipa workshop⁴ was founded by Giuseppe and later passed into the hands of his eldest son Andrea (1725 -1766), appreciated throughout Europe for the “softness and fineness”

³ Simonetta La Barbera, op. cit. 2003, p. 243.

⁴ See the biographies of the sculptors by Lina Novara in Luigi Sarullo, *Dizionario degli Artisti Siciliani. Scultura*, Palermo 1994, pp. 326 -327.







2. Tipa Workshop, *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum



3. Andrea Tipa and collaborators, *Nativity Scene*, Ciminna, Museo Civico

of his ivory crucifixes and his ability to work a variety of valuable materials such as the so-called “*pietra incarnata*”, a particular variety of translucent alabaster with reddish veins widespread specifically in the Trapani area. With him worked his brother Alberto (1732 - 1783), who specialized in the creation of crucifixes and complex sculpture groups. The Tipa brothers dedicated themselves very successfully to the execution of nativity scenes characterized by the use of different materials, often employing ivory in combination with other rare coloured materials as was typical of Sicilian Baroque art.

In one of these works, the Ciminna Nativity⁵, we see some similarities between the little figures carved in ivory, who prepare to pay homage to the baby Jesus with studied attitudes, and those of the shepherds in our nativity scene; likewise, the Holy Family adopts similar poses in both works. Thanks to its complex structural conception, the fineness of the ornaments, its expressive efficacy and, not least, the technical skill with which both the figures and the rocky landscape were sculpted, this *Nativity* can justifiably be attributed to the Tipa brothers.

ENRICO COLLE

⁵ The topic of nativity scenes from Trapani and the activity of the Tipa brothers has recently been studied by Maria Concetta di Natale, *Andrea Tipa e il Presepe di Ciminna*, in OADI, no. 26, December 2022, to which I refer for all further bibliography.



ABDUCTION OF PROSERPINA

Signed and dated on the bottom left “LDCaro [intertwined initials] f. 1748”

Oil on canvas, 100 × 155 cm

Essentially independent of the dominant academic style, the oeuvre of Lorenzo De Caro offers a sort of lighter version of the pompous manner of Francesco Solimena, reinterpreted with chromatic freedom and a flair for design, with an approach that is already *rocaille*.

Thanks to the studies of Gustavo De Caro¹, incidentally a direct descendant of the painter, the biography of this *petit-maitre* of 18th-century Naples, very incomplete until a couple of decades ago, has now taken on more defined contours, with a consequent revision of the dates at which his artistic career began and ended. Unknown to Bernardo De Dominici, De Caro is initially described as a “painter of ornaments” on the occasion of his canonical marriage interview in 1743; by 1757 he already appears to own a workshop in the vicinity of the Strada di Chiaia, in which – in ways that remain to be defined – some of his family members were also later active. However, the painter’s early work is still poorly understood. The canvases for the parish church of Piedimonte San Germano documented in 1740 have been lost², while the vault of the entrance hall of the Neapolitan hospital of the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini has been demolished. De Caro’s restoration work on the frescoes by Paolo Schepers in the dome of the church of Santi Severino e Sossio, dating to around the mid-1740s, and those by Belisario Corenzio in the Treasury and sacristy of the church of the Annunziata also in Naples and dated 1750, is difficult to make out.

As a consequence, our knowledge of De Caro’s early works has hitherto been entrusted essentially to the altarpiece with the Virgin of Mount Carmel between St Bartholomew, St Jerome and donors formerly on the high altar of San Girolamo dei Ciechi in Naples³, signed

¹ Gustavo De Caro, *Note archivistiche su Lorenzo de Caro, pittore napoletano del ’700*, in “Napoli nobilissima”, V s., III, 2002, pp. 73-75; cfr. also Gustavo De Caro, Mirella Marini, Rosario Pinto, *Lorenzo De Caro. Pittore del ’700*, Nocera 2005.

² Vincenzo Rizzo, *Notizie su artisti e artefici dai giornali copiapolizze degli antichi banchi pubblici napoletani*, in Salvatore Abita *et al.*, *Le arti figurative a Napoli nel Settecento. Documenti e ricerche*, coordinated by Nicola Spinosa, Naples 1979, p. 229, doc. no. 15.

³ A rare but modest illustration of the canvas, formerly mentioned by Franco Strazzullo, *Postille alla Guida*





in the same year, and to the small model for the painting now in the Kunsthalle in Bremen⁴ (Fig. 1).

As such, given its date of 1748, the painting presented here, originally accompanied by a companion piece with *Diana and Acteon*, now in a private collection (Fig. 2), takes on an important role in anchoring the artist's career. All the more so because the levity of the mythological subject suggests a rapport with the decorative projects on which De Caro was working in the same year for the residence of Nicola Iannoccaro, "located above Rosario di Palazzo"⁵, and that of Donna Brigida Gomez Cardosa for "her house at Monte Calvario"⁶.

Though a 'minor' artist, it is in such works, to a greater extent than in his paintings for churches (rediscovered by critics only starting in the 1970s), that we see the most genuine and distinctive expression of De Caro's style, to be understood as a witty and original response, removed from academic templates, to two trends in the Neapolitan figurative culture of the mid-18th century. These are the lively pictorial approach of Solimena's final works and the realist interest in the penetrating characterization of human figures cultivated – in its highest form of expression – by Gaspare Traversi.

GIUSEPPE PORZIO

sacra della città di Napoli *del Galante*, Naples 1962, p. 19, can be found in the monograph by De Caro, Marini and Pinto cited in note 1, p. 153, Fig. 33, noting its presence in the storerooms of the Basilica of the Incoronata Madre del Buon Consiglio in Naples.

⁴ Inv. no. 439-1937/11. Andreas Kreul, *Kunsthalle Bremen. Verzeichnis sämtlicher Gemälde. des 14. bis 20. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1994, p. 16, cat. no. 181.

⁵ Mario Alberto Pavone, *Pittori napoletani del '700. Nuovi documenti*, documentary appendix by Umberto Fiore, Naples 1994, p. 127, doc. no. 28b.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 127-128, doc. no. 28c.



26.

Baldassare De Blasio

(documented in Naples from 1750 to 1764)

After a model by Giuseppe Picano (documented in Naples in the second half of the 18th century)

SAN JOSEPH WITH THE CHILD

SAN VINCENT FERRER

Second half of 18th Century

Silver and gilded bronze, 36 x 24.5 x 18 cm

These two notable silver busts, based on a classic reliquary model, remind instantly of the exceptional ones of the protective Saints in Naples, in the San Gennaro chapel of the Duomo, and seem to be precisely datable to the year 1750, or 1756. Underneath both busts, in fact, we find the punzoni of the goldsmiths who licensed the pieces, and the consular one is recognizable also because of the comparison to the one at the back of one of these busts, in a position that granted it perfect conservation: the monogram is “BDBC” reconductable to Baldassare De Blasio (the ‘C’ stood for consul). The stamps of the goldsmith who physically produced the busts are no longer readable.

The De Blasios were the most famous goldsmiths of the XVIII century in Naples: in addition to Baldassarre, also Andrea, Domenico, Gennaro and Nicola were elected consuls of the corporation in multiple occasions (respectively in 1714, 1720, 1723; in 1725, 1728, 1733, 1735; in 1740, 1741, 1747; in 1750, 1752, 1756, 1776). We are not aware of a stamp used by Baldassare only as a goldsmith and not as a consul, but we are sure that, as for his relatives, he must have had one (we have news of him from 1750 to 1764).

The invention of Saint Joseph with the Child is to be attributed to a wooden sculpture signed and dated by Giuseppe Picano (A. 1771 JOSEPH PICANO S.), now located in the Church of Saint Agostino della Zecca in Naples. It must have been a very fortunate invention, as we are able to tell not only by the date and the sign of the version in Sant’Agostino, but also by the existence of a terracotta replica recently appeared on the market. Giuseppe, son of Francesco Picano, who must have started him son to the technique of carving wood (Francesco is documented as sculptor in 1737 and 1740), is lengthily referred to, because of documents and signed artworks, just as a “Sculutore di legno”, active in Naples but serving all the Kingdom (in December of 1782, for instance, he would receive a commission for the Immacolata Concezione for the Chiesa Madre in San Giovanni Battista Decollato in Bivogno, Calabria, where it still stands). In addition to that, in 1781, Picano receives payments for “all the marble and plaster sculptures and their models” of the major altar in the Annunziata Church in Naples.





Giuseppe Picano, *Saint Joseph with the child*, Naples, Sant'Agostino della Zecca

The identification of the Saint represented in the second bust is not an issue, because of the writing in the open book, associated to San Vincenzo Ferrer, whose cult in Naples, lengthily documented, started being stronger from colera epidemic of 1837, after that he was proclaimed protector of the city (one of his busts was located in the San Gennaro chapel). The quality of modeling, mostly in Saint Joseph, because of the beautiful drapery, remind us of the most famous examples of neapolitan silverwaring of the XVIII century: like the San Rocco by Nicola De Blasio dated 1751 (Guardia Sanframondi, Museo). It is possible that both models were made by Picano , and that he realized them right before modeling the signed and dated sculpture in Saint Agostino alla Zecca, made after the artwork here presented.

ANDREA BACCHI







ANGEL

Polychrome terracotta, h. 76 cm

The intensely emotional expression of this *Angel*, who brings his right hand to his chest, suggests that this may be a piece formerly belonging to a Pietà group (though this subject generally included weeping angels, not merely in a generically mournful attitude) or, less probably, to a funerary monument (though no funerary monuments executed with elements in polychrome terracotta are known, as in such cases more valuable marbles were almost invariably used). It is thus difficult to establish the original function of this polychrome terracotta, which given the exceptional finishing of every part should obviously be considered a completed work and not a preparatory model. The stylistic features, in the treatment of both the Angel's curls, highly distinctive also for the deliberate decision to leave the temples bare, and the drapery clearly argue in favour of an attribution of this piece to Giuseppe Sanmartino, the greatest Neapolitan sculptor of the second half of the 18th century. Over the course of his career, this great master was called on several occasions to execute figures of angels and putti, an essential adornment for altars and funerary monuments, including those over the entrance door to the high altar of the church of the Gesù Nuovo, of the late 1750s, and the torchbearing angels for the church of the Girolamini, finished in 1787.¹ The closest parallels for this work include those with the torchbearing Angels on the high altar of the church of the Nunziatella, or those formerly on the altar of the chapel of St Benedict in the church of Santi Marcellino e Feste or again the weeping angels on the *Monument to Philip of Bourbon* in Santa Chiara (works dating respectively to the sixth, seventh and early eighth decade of the century).² For the former a little terracotta model survives, now of unknown location, in which the angels are posed in ways that the artist later translated into marble in the two groups at the sides of the altar (the standing angel with his gaze turned downwards reappears in the pair to the right of the altar; the movement of the head of the kneeling angel is replicated in the Angel to the left of the altar, also kneeling).³

¹ For an up-to-date overview of the sculptor's career, cfr. Alessandro D'Alfonso, *Sanmartino, Giuseppe*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 90, Rome 2017, pp. 236-242 (pp. 237 and 240 for the works mentioned here).

² Elio Catello, *Sanmartino*, Naples 1988, pp. 60-62 and 82-84; D'Alfonso, *Sanmartino* cit., p. 237.

³ The works in the Nunziatella were already illustrated in Teodoro Fittipaldi, *Scultura napoletana del Settecento*, Naples 1980, p. 67 and Figs 224-225.







Giuseppe Sanmartino, *Torchbearing Angels*, whereabouts unknown



Giuseppe Sanmartino, *Torchbearing Angels*, Naples, Nunziatella

Sanmartino, who in all likelihood trained in the workshop of Matteo Bottiglieri, was essentially a sculptor who worked ‘by subtraction’, and his major works are thus almost all in marble, starting with the very famous *Veiled Christ* in the Sansevero Chapel signed and dated 1753, with which he definitively made his mark in Naples when aged just over thirty. The documents tell us that he was often commissioned to execute preparatory terracottas,⁴ in accordance with a practice widespread throughout 18th century Italy, and some of these are known today: we could mention that for the *Charity* of 1757 in the church of the Certosa di San Martino (sold on the London antique market),⁵ the preparatory terracotta for the *St Theresa of Avila* sculpted in marble for Taranto cathedral (1772-1773; model acquired by the Museo di San Martino in Naples),⁶ or again the two models for two statues sculpted by his pupil Angelo

⁴ D’Alfonso, *Sanmartino* cit., p. 237.

⁵ Elio Catello, *Il bozzetto di Giuseppe Sanmartino per la ‘Carità’ della Certosa napoletana*, in “Napoli nobilissima”, LXVII, 2010, pp. 53-58.

⁶ Andrea Bacchi, entry in *Terrecotte italiane tra Manierismo e Barocco*, catalogue ed. by Massimo Vezzosi, Florence 1997, pp. 48-57, no. 6; Elio Catello, *Giuseppe Sanmartino 1720 – 1793*, Naples 2004, p. 68.





Giuseppe Sanmartino, Altar frontal, Naples, Santi Marcellino e Festo

Viva for the Pappacoda chapel (1780; also in a private collection).⁷ Of the Neapolitan sculptors of the 18th century Sanmartino is probably the best known today as a clay modeller, and the recent studies by Riccardo Naldi have analysed this aspect of his production.⁸ Though almost ‘life-size’ polychrome terracotta works by Sanmartino executed for religious buildings – as this *Angel* probably was – are currently not known, it is likely that he did make such pieces on various occasions. The sculptor did not work only in marble: he made numerous works in stucco and in 1768 executed two *Angels* in stucco and papier-maché for the Certosa di San Martino

⁷ Andrea Bacchi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino, Angelo Viva e gli Evangelisti della cappella Pappacoda*, Florence 2009.

⁸ Riccardo Naldi, *Per Sanmartino modellatore: un San Giuseppe con il Bambino in terracotta*, in “Ricerche sull’arte a Napoli in età moderna”, 2014, pp. 134-143; Riccardo Naldi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino Modeller. A Saint Andrew the Apostle of terra-cotta*, Munich 2015. Cfr. also Johanna Hecht, “I’m no Angel”: a terracotta model of Saint Vincent Ferrer by Giuseppe Sanmartino, in “The Metropolitan Museum Journal”, XXXVII, 2002, pp. 229-238; Cristiano Giometti, *Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia. Sculture in terracotta*, Rome 2011, pp. 122-125.



Giuseppe Sanmartino, *Monument to Philip of Bourbon*, detail, Naples, Santa Chiara

(by contrast, no works in polychrome wood by the sculptor are attested, though this medium was fairly popular in 17th and 18th century Naples).⁹ Finally, in at least two cases Sanmartino modelled terracottas as finished works: the *St Lazarus* of 1764 for the crypt of the Santissima Annunziata,¹⁰ and the famous *Portrait of Father Rocco* of 1775-1776 in the Museo Nazionale di San Martino.¹¹ The artist's efforts in the field of nativity scenes are also well known, and numerous lively coloured figurines have been attributed to Sanmartino.¹² Among those on

⁹ Catello, *Giuseppe Sanmartino* cit., pp. 40-53, esp. p. 51.

¹⁰ Catello, *Giuseppe Sanmartino* cit., p. 155.

¹¹ Roberto Middione, *Museo Nazionale di San Martino. Le raccolte di scultura*, Naples 2001, p. 85, no. 2.6; cfr. also pp. 84-85, no. 2.5.

¹² Catello, *Sanmartino* cit., pp. 110-116.



religious subjects we should mention at least the two groups with the *Pietà*, also in polychrome terracotta, now in the monastery of the Girolamini.¹³

Sanmartino's role as founder of the Neapolitan school of sculpture is confirmed not only by his versatility (he also supplied numerous models to the silversmiths of the period), but above all by the number and calibre of his pupils and imitators, from Angelo Viva to Gaetano Salomone, from Giuseppe Picano to Salvatore Franco.¹⁴ The generosity of Neapolitan patronage, and especially that of the religious orders, allowed Sanmartino to spend his entire career in his native city, only sending some works to other cities in southern Italy (in 1767, for example, he sculpted the *Torchbearing Angels* for the high altar in Foggia cathedral). The sources clearly speak of a fully established sculptor, also guaranteeing him an enviable economic status, and testify that by 1780 Sanmartino was in addition a genuine collector, to the extent that his substantial collection of prints represented an attraction for travellers (from Giannantonio Selva to Pietro Antonio Maria Zani).¹⁵ Perhaps this *Angel* in terracotta should be ascribed precisely to this late phase in the artist's career, at a time when he was much in demand both as a marble sculptor and as a versatile clay modeller.

ANDREA BACCHI

¹³ Catello, *Sanmartino* cit., pp. 114–116 and 150.

¹⁴ Fittipaldi, *Scultura napoletana* cit., pp. 68–69.

¹⁵ D'Alfonso, *Sanmartino* cit., p. 239.



*Viva Brothers**Giacomo (documented in Naples from 1760 to 1782)**Angelo (Naples 1748 – 1837)*

THE PATIENCE OF JOB OR JOB DERIDED

Polychrome terracotta, 48.5 x 67 cm

Inscription: JOP / CAP. 2 / VIVO FE

This polychrome relief can be attributed to one of the two Viva brothers: Giacomo, far less well known today and who seems to vanish from the record in the 1780s, or Angelo, widely documented until well into the 19th century. The attribution is made possible by the inscription that appears on the bottom left, the last line of which should obviously be expanded to read “VIVO FECIT”. Indeed, the two Neapolitan sculptors were also known as “de Viva” or “de Vivo”, and in an autograph list of his works Angelo referred to himself using the latter reading.¹ The style of this work also points directly towards these students of Giuseppe Sanmartino, two interesting figures in southern Italian sculpture between the 18th and 19th centuries, but largely neglected by recent criticism.² The subject depicted is also instantly recognizable thanks to the inscription, which refers to chapter two of the Book of Job: the protagonist is the patient man par excellence, Job, derided and insulted by three of his friends (his wife is also sometimes present, though not here).³

We do not know of independent works by Giacomo Viva, but nonetheless he is the brother attested in Sanmartino’s workshop in the early 1760s. In the second half of the 1770s, he is documented with his brother on some monumental projects: the two *Torch-Bearing Angels*

¹ Elio Catello, *Sanmartino*, Naples 1988, p. 177, doc. no. XLVI.

² After the entries *Viva, Angelo, Viva, Giacomo* by Sergio Ortolani (in Ulrich Thieme, Felix Becker, *Künstlerlexikon*, 34, 1940, p. 442) and an initial discussion by Catello (preceding note, pp. 121-125), the Viva brothers have not, for example, been included in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, nor has any monographic study ever been devoted to them. On them see most recently Andrea Bacchi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino, Angelo Viva e gli Evangelisti della cappella Pappacoda*, Florence 2009, pp. 10-34, also including information on his brother, Giacomo. Finally, we do not know if the brothers were related to Francesco Viva (1757-1803) hitherto attested only as a creator of figures for nativity scenes (Elio Catello, *Dizionario biografico degli artisti*, in *Presepe Napoletano*, Sorrento 1997, p. 230).

³ For an *excursus* on the iconographical fortunes of this theme in painting, and especially in Venetian art between the 17th and 18th centuries, cf. Denis Ton, “*La pazienza di Giobbe*” di Sebastiano Ricci e un aggiornamento sull’attività bellunese del maestro, in Sebastiano Ricci. “*La Pazienza di Giobbe*”: un restauro in ricordo di Giovanna Galasso, ed. by Denis Ton, Verona 2014, pp. 29-38.







for the high altar of San Paolo Maggiore, the high altar of Santa Maria di Portosalvo and *Hope, Faith* and two *Angels* for the chapel of the Santissimo Crocifisso in Lecce cathedral.⁴ There seems to be no further information on Giacomo after 1782 and, as I have said, we could suggest that in an initial phase he was the dominant figure. This is confirmed by the fact that, after this date, Angelo does not on his own show those traits obviously derived from Sanmartino and evident in the works of the 1770s, instead developing a less vivacious style that later becomes a constant in his works.⁵ At the same time, as already remarked in 1788 by Giuseppe Sigismondo, Angelo must also have been a ‘student of Sanmartino’;⁶ additionally, as the artist himself declared in a ‘Note on my works’ drawn up in 1832, he was capable of expressing himself in marble, terracotta and even papier-mâché, listing within his corpus works executed in this humble medium.⁷ A significant part of his oeuvre – this part of which is largely lost – probably

⁴ Bacchi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino, Angelo Viva* cit., pp. 15-21.

⁵ Bacchi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino, Angelo Viva* cit., pp. 21-28.

⁶ Giuseppe Sigismondo, *Descrizione della città di Napoli e suoi borghi*, II, 1788, pp. 204-205.

⁷ Catello, *Sanmartino* cit., pp. 177-178.

consisted of little figures for nativity scenes or devotional objects (consider the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, polychrome like this relief, attributed to him by Catello).⁸

The subject depicted here, obviously, prompted an almost folkloristic and humorous interpretation of the Viva brothers' expressive talents. In his book on Sanmartino, Catello reproduced a terracotta, which he ascribed to Angelo Viva, depicting a *Peasant Woman with Her Children* (Rome, Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Venezia), in this same style, typical of Naples between the 18th and 19th centuries. While awaiting new studies and, it is to be hoped, the emergence of new works that make it possible to better understand these two artists, we can in the meantime observe that the relief discussed here presents reminiscences of Sanmartino. An example is the elegant flow of the red drapery of the figure on the left, despite a sometimes clumsy compositional control of the scene. However, the ostensible errors in this relief in some ways represent its most commendable feature, revealing an artist capable of speaking to an audience not made up exclusively of sophisticated connoisseurs. Also noteworthy in this context are the loud colours of the garments (the still life in the foreground) and the rapport between the figures and the landscape setting. Only further research will tell us if this is a work by Giacomo, or, as seems more probable, by Angelo, at a date that nonetheless still falls within the 18th century.

ANDREA BACCHI

⁸ Catello, *Sanmartino* cit., pp. 122-123.



29.

Gaetano Dattilo

(Active in Naples during the Second Half of the 18th Century)

Monogram “G.D.”

**PRESENTATION OF JESUS AT THE TEMPLE
PRESENTATION OF MARY AT THE TEMPLE**

Corporate Stamp: Napoli 1793 (NAP 793)

Consular Stamp: Fabio Giordano using the Stamp of his father Biagio

Silver and Gilded Bronze

Respectively 58 x 30 x 20 cm and 56.5 x 30 x 21 cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Naples

These two extraordinary neapolitan silver sculptures, of outstanding quality, both feature the monogram of a silversmith: “G.D.”. The corporate guarantee stamp (present in both sculptures: “NAP 793”), is useful to determine the datation of the two artworks. The only silversmith whose initials are “G.D.” recorded by the Catellos ¹ is Gaetano Dattilo, the author of the important *Assunta* (fig.1) of 1772 of the Gerace Cathedral, in Calabria ².

The beautiful group of Gerace is signed on the base “Gaetano Dattilo F.”, where the F. stands for Fecit, and features two stamps of the neapolitan silversmith. The *Assunta* of Gerace is also referred to as the most important silver sculpture commissioned by Bishop Scoppa, who was later portrayed by Salvatore Franco, the artist who made the preparatory model for the *Assunta*.

The subject of our two groups is perfectly symmetrical: on one side the father, Joseph, is escorting his son, Jesus (with the two doves as an offer to the Temple), on the other side the mother, Anna (characterized by the advanced age) is escorting her daughter, Mary. We recognise in the richness of the drapery the relationship of the author of the models with the neapolitan baroque sculpture, but the emphasis in the style of Sanmartino is softened, and the measured classicism belongs to a new artistic season. The gilded silver base remind us of the great tradition of neapolitan silver sculptures of the XVIII century, we can mention as a reference the group of *Tobia and the angel* of the Tesoro Chapel of San Gennaro, late masterpiece

¹ Corrado Catello, Elio Catello, *Argenti napoletani dal XVI al XIX secolo*, Napoli 1973, p. 163.

² Elio Catello, Corrado Catello in *Scultura in Argento Nel Sei e Settecento a Napoli*, Naples, p. 127.





1. Gaetano Dattilo, *Assunta*, Gerace, Cathedral

of Giuseppe Sanmartino, who supplied the model in 1791 (the silversmiths Giuseppe and Gennaro Del Giudice realised it in 1797)³. That masterpiece represented a sort of swansong of the neapolitan baroque: four year posterior to our groups, it didn't show in any way the quick, imminent change of times. Yet referring to the specific genre of the silver sculptures, more popular in taste than others, mainly because of their devotional purpose, we do not find any stylistic turn by the end of the XVIII century, even looking at the larger context of the followers of Sanmartino, it is rather difficult to find terms of comparison with these two sculptures, already fully neoclassical in style. The models, or sculptures with clear similarities with the ones

³ Maria Confalone, essay in *Giubili e Santi d'argento*, exhibition catalogue, Naples, Capodimonte museum, curated by Angela Catello and Umberto Bile, Naples, 2000, p. 58, cat. 18.





2. Giuseppe Sanmartino, *Tobia and the Angel*, Naples, San Gennaro, Tesoro Chapel



we examine today are not to be found in the production of Angelo Viva (Napoli 1748 – 1837)⁴; or of Giuseppe Picano (Sant’Elia Fiumerapido 1716 – 1810) ⁵. One silver sculpture is known to be inspired by a Picano wooden model, *Saint Joseph with the Child* (signed and dated 1771; Naples, Sant’Agostino alla Zecca) (cfr. 26). The same way, Salvatore Franco (active in Naples between 1770 and 1815) has been referred as the maker of the model for the already mentioned

⁴ Andrea Bacchi, *Giuseppe Sanmartino, Angelo Viva e gli Evangelisti della cappella Pappacoda*, Firenze 2009.

⁵ Teodoro Fittipaldi, *Scultura napoletana del Settecento*, Napoli 1980, pp. 195-198 about the father of Giuseppe Giovanni Petrucci, *Francesco Antonio Picano nella scultura del Settecento napoletano*, Montecassino 2005.

Assunta of Gerace ⁶, an artwork that, as anticipated has not much to do with our groups, if not being made by the same silversmith.

In our case, we are referring to very notable pieces, not only because of the high quality of the modeling and of the silver realisation, but because of their uniqueness also from a stylistic standpoint, in relation with the contemporary neapolitan production.

ANDREA BACCHI

⁶ Roberta Catello, essay in *Giubilei e Santi d'argento* cit. p. 54, cat. 16



TABLETOP WITH A SAMPLER OF SICILIAN HARDSTONES

Inlay of Sicilian jaspers, 78 x 141.5 cm

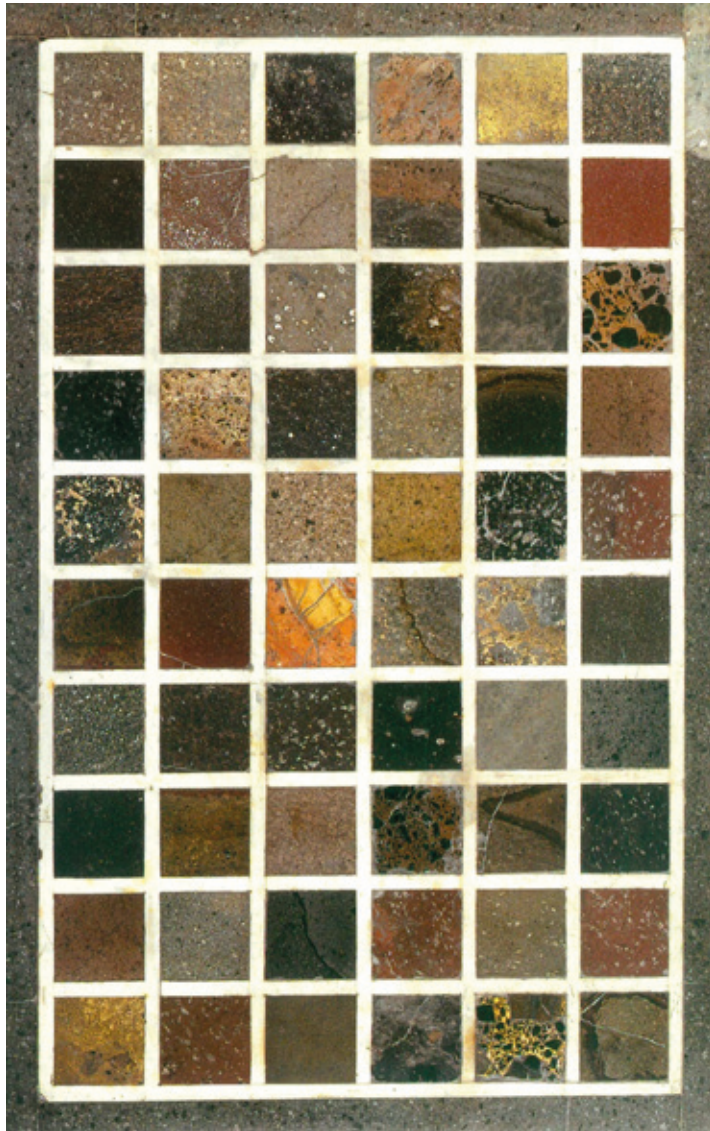
Marble and hardstone inlays appeared in Sicily during antiquity and became significantly more common during the Renaissance thanks to artistic exchanges with marble workers and sculptors from Tuscany, Lombardy and Liguria. During the 16th century, the commissions received from powerful religious orders and from the viceroys led them to introduce to the island the art of inlaying stone, already widely practiced in Rome and Florence. Later, during the 17th century, Sicilian master inlayers adapted to the Roman Baroque style, executing luxurious liturgical decorations using coloured marbles, jaspers and corals in a variegated profusion of ornaments with scroll motifs and tangles of acanthus leaves arranged around the sacred scenes inlaid at the centre of altar frontals or on the interior walls of churches. In the 18th century, the fashion for possessing works made of inlaid marbles and hardstones also reached the Sicilian aristocracy, whose members chose to furnish the halls of their palaces with valuable caskets, tables and ornaments. At the end of this century, the extraordinary popularity of the many types of stone and jasper present on the island among stone workers all over Europe led Sicilian scholars to embark on a systematic study of these precious products of the earth. They succeeded in correctly classifying them thanks in part to their systematic display inside genuine scientific cabinets, owned by the more enlightened aristocrats or by religious communities. A tabletop in the Museo Archeologico di Palermo, but originally from the collections of the museum in the monastery of San Martino delle Scale (Fig. 1), testifies in the orderly arrangement of the little squares of marble to this new scientific interest, documented in 1774 by Salvatore Maria Di Blasi. In his guide to the monastery's collections, he reported that in one of the rooms of the museum there were "arranged in good order" many of the marbles and "hardstones of Sicily"¹.

Thanks to their varicoloured hues, Sicilian jaspers and agates, "sublimated in all the shades of red, yellow, green and purple"², were thus always widely appreciated for the creation of luxu-

¹ Caterina Napoleone, *I marmi: accenno al commesso siciliano del XVII e XVIII secolo*, in Vincenzo Abbate, ed., *Wunderkammern siciliana alle origini del museo perduto*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2001, pp. 177 – 179.

² Caterina Napoleone, *L'impiego dei diaspri e delle agate di Sicilia dal XVI al XVII secolo*, in Maria Concetta di Natale, ed., *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti Decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, catalogue of the exhibition, Palermo 2000, pp. 193 – 203.





1. *Tabletop inlaid with various Sicilian marbles*, last quarter of the 18th century, Palermo, Museo Regionale Archeologico

rious furniture and interior decorations. The mines in the plain of Catania, alongside those in the vicinity of Palermo, were the centres around which the working of these stones developed most significantly and the place where our tabletop was very likely executed. It reflects the vogue for classifying stones that had become fashionable in Rome during the Neoclassical period, examples of which survive in the various tabletops still visible in museums and private collections. These pieces nonetheless differ from our table for the use of marbles, often ancient, instead of hardstones, employed only in two other slightly smaller tabletops, now in the palace at Caserta and executed by 1804 by the Real Laboratorio delle Pietre Dure in Naples³. Compared to the latter, in which the jasper squares are separated by strips of touchstone, the work

³ Alvar González – Palacios, *Mosaici e pietre dure. Mosaici a piccole tessere - Pietre dure a Parigi e a Napoli*, Milan 1981, pp. 68 -69.





2. Real Laboratorio delle Pietre Dure, Naples,
Tabletop inlaid with various Sicilian hardstones,
ca. 1804, Caserta, Royal Palace



examined here is entirely original for the use of ebony and rosewood, and for the arrangement of the stones. Strikingly contrasting lozenge shapes culminate at the centre in a larger panel with the intense red speckled colour of Santa Maria del Bosco jasper, while at either end is a smaller panel of Mussumeli jasper. The opulent chromatic effect thus obtained, thanks to the changeable alternation of these endlessly varied hardstones, makes this tabletop a rare example of the sophisticated 18th-century taste for combinations of stones, while simultaneously documenting the scientific interests of the Sicilian intellectuals of the time.

ENRICO COLLE

PAIR OF GUÉRIDONS

Carved, painted and gilt wood, top in *africano* marble, 104 x 34.5 cm

This pair of guéridons belongs to a series of three-legged tables made in Palermo to furnish the halls of the city's palaces, recently renovated in the wake of the new Neoclassical taste introduced by the architect Andrea Gigante (1731 – 1787) and continued by his followers Venanzio Marvuglia (1729 – 1814) and Léon Dufourny (1754 – 1818).

Their architectural works are an unprecedented example of an Italian interpretation of French Neoclassicism, fusing allusions to the Louis XVI style with citations of ancient monuments. Marvuglia was responsible for the construction of major aristocratic residences and for the redesign of the Chinese Palace in the La Favorita park, sold in 1799 by Baron Benedetto Lombardo to Ferdinand IV, then in exile in Sicily. At the same time as Marvuglia was working in Palermo, from 1789 to 1793, Léon Dufourny also lived in the city. He designed the new buildings in the Botanical Gardens and was in constant contact with the most avant-garde circles of the city's nobility, for which he designed sober interiors with furniture inspired by the severe forms later typical of the Directoire style.

The collection of the architect's drawings held in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris includes some dated to 1791 that show the arrangement of the furnishings in some of the rooms in which the Viceroy of Sicily, Prince of Caramanico, resided. On other sheets Dufourny drew some rapid sketches for various types of furniture including a three-legged table (Figs 1 – 2) very similar in its structure to the guéridons discussed here¹.

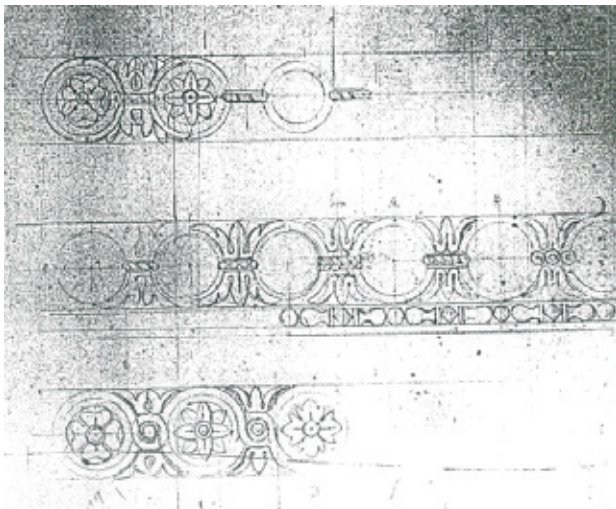
The slender design and calculated restraint of the ornaments of our furnishings also resemble those of the three-legged tables in Villa Niscemi (Fig. 3) and Palazzo Villafranca, probably furnished by the best cabinetmakers then active in Palermo, like Pietro Marabitti, Giuseppe Palma, Girolamo del Carretto, Crispino Vivilacqua and Gioacchino Incardona, alongside the gilder Antonio Pellegrino. While the design of the guéridons can thus be ascribed to Dufourny, their execution may be the work of one of the aforementioned cabinetmakers; for the marble tops, given the rarity of the stone used, we can suggest the name of the celebrated marble worker Giosuè Durante, who often worked with Marvuglia and who frequently met

¹ Enrico Colle, *Il mobile neoclassico in Italia. Arredi e decorazioni d'interni dal 1775 al 1800*, Milan 2005, p.66.





1. L. Dufourny, Design for a three-legged table



2. L. Dufourny, Designs for decorations, Paris, National Library Paris, National Library



Fig. 3. Sicilian workshop, Three-legged table, Palermo, Villa Niscemi

Léon Dufourny to discuss the use of the various marbles in his designs or to plan the purchase of rare stones².

ENRICO COLLE

² Léon Dufourny, *Diario di un giacobino a Palermo 1789 – 1793*, ed. by G.Bautier Bresc, Palermo 1991.



*Neapolitan manufactory of Cherinto del Vecchio (1782–1860)***AMPHORA-SHAPED CREAMWARE VASE WITH ‘COLUMNAR’ HANDLES, DECORATED WITH FOLK SCENES, 1818–1820**

H. 56 cm

Provenance: Formerly in the Imbert collection (as specified by the label under the base)

This imposing vase is still one of a kind within Neapolitan creamware production.¹ It is unique both for the extraordinarily rich and varied repertoire of friezes and for the interpretation of the traditional folk scenes decorating the front and back. One of these depicts the *Return from the Festival of Montevergine* while the other is a witty and allusive composition with a fisherman showing a girl the fish he has just caught under the disapproving gaze of her mother and little sister. These scenes were certainly based on prints, as was customary, but not on the usual repertoire popularized by Saverio della Gatta or his colleagues from 1823–25 onwards. Instead, they belong to an unusual parallel repertoire, in which the scene is viewed through the eyes of a foreigner, enchanted by the same festivals and folk customs but with greater detachment and depicting the characters in garments and attitudes marked by northern European influences. This suggests that these two scenes can be attributed to the small circle of foreign artists who arrived in Naples for various reasons during the decade of French rule: to join the troops of Napoleon and Murat, or drawn from 1815 by a desire to take advantage of the new opportunities for work that opened up once peace had been consolidated, making artistic reproductions aimed at the travellers of the Grand Tour.

It is thus no accident if the names of the artists most involved in disseminating the images that popularized southern Italian folklore are those of non-Neapolitans, including Bartolomeo Pinelli, but especially Germans and Austrians like Friedrich Kaiser, Hieronimus Hess and above all Carl Theodor Muller, who gave a fundamental impetus to printmaking.² Theirs was a variegated world of foreign artist-entrepreneurs who, lacking the traditional ties to earlier artistic developments, introduced a new way of depicting the colourful local world. Nonetheless, in the space of a decade this fruitful phase was rapidly superseded by the proliferation of local competition. On careful inspection, our vase presents some peculiarities that are of particular interest, in part for the extremely varied repertoire of friezes that succeed one another in ac-

¹ Guido Donatone, *La terraglia Napoletana (1782–1860)*, Plt. 27, ill. a–b, Naples, Grimaldi e & C, 1991

² Lucio Fino, *Scene e costumi popolari a Napoli tra '700 e '800. Stampe acquarelli e gouaches da Fabris a De Bourcard*, pp. 85–109, Grimaldi e & C. 2004





cordance with a pronounced *horror vacui* unusual for the Neapolitan wares of the Del Vecchio, Migliuolo and Giustiniani manufactories but found instead in ceramics from Palermo and the so-called *Fabbrica nuova del Barone Malvica*.³ Our vase suggests some complex and conflicting considerations:

- 1) Starting from the base, in an illogical sequence, the sequence of friezes consists of a motif of linked lozenges, followed by several small dark blue stripes of differing width, and then another mustard-coloured band with a repeated internal decoration that serves as a connection to another much wider motif of garlands and flower swags. After the narrow part of the foot, moving upwards, we find on the belly of the vase the large panels fully occupied by two painted scenes, connected towards the base and mouth by linked flower garlands and bounded at the sides by slender yellow frames with an internal motif of ivy leaves and branches arranged in two rows in the antique manner.
- 2) Beneath the wide mouth of the amphora is a band of linked oval panels containing flowers, a frieze often present in Malvica ceramics. The two octagonal panels with birds painted on the neck of our amphora and the two medallions with floral trophies underneath the columnar handles are also connected to the motifs used by the Palermitan

³ Luciana Arbace and Rosario Daidone, eds, *Terzo fuoco a Palermo 1760- 1825, Ceramiche di Sperlinga e di Malvica*, Arnaldo Lombardi editore, Palermo 1997





manufactory. By contrast, the painted subjects move decidedly away from the Sicilian repertoire and instead reflect the Neapolitan taste for markedly folkloric scenes in bright, bold colours; at Malvica the preference was for caricatures or subjects modelled imaginatively on antiquity, reworked in pastel hues.

On the basis of these considerations, it seems logical to deduce that our extraordinary vase was executed very soon after the return to Naples of Ferdinand IV – now Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies – in other words from 1818 to before 1820. At this time, Cherinto Del Vecchio, who in the 1780s had been awarded a monopoly by the Royal House, may have learned of the king's appreciation for the refined ceramics that he had received as a tribute from Baron Malvica during his time in Palermo – now in storage at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte. He thus attempted to regain his former privileged role and the much coveted royal commissions in the face of the fierce competition of the Giustiniani, the Migliuolo and the other new manufactories that were opening in Via Marinella.

ANGELA CARÒLA-PERROTTI

Finished printing
in February 2025

